Sam Ashman

Symposium on David Harvey’s *The New Imperialism*: Editorial Introduction

The renewal of serious theoretical debate about imperialism is now much remarked upon. It has been produced by real-world events since the end of the Cold War, above all by the Bush administration’s wars in Afghanistan and Iraq in response to 9/11 and, more recently, its support for Israel’s war in Lebanon and sabre rattling against Syria and Iran. And, if the Left has discovered new saliency in the term, so too has the Right, from Niall Ferguson’s populist defence of empire to Andrew Bacevich’s dissection of the US’s ‘war for the imperium’.

Many questions are raised by this new discussion. How do we situate immediate events in relation to deeper theoretical understandings? How does the present relate to the past? What is the role played by oil in current events? There is general agreement that the classical theorists of imperialism, whose accounts are now nearly a hundred years old, may be important reference points but they are not an adequate guide to the contemporary world – and, for some, they were not an adequate guide to the world.

---

1 Bacevich 2002; Ferguson 2002 and 2004. For a direct critique of the latter see Chibber 2005 and, for a proleptic one, see Davis 2001.
of their time. There is far less agreement on how developments in capitalism impact upon understandings of imperialism, particularly the uneven and unequal global geographic spread of capitalism and the system of nation-states in the period since 1945. How precisely has the world moved on?

Two short responses to these questions were published in 2003: David Harvey’s *The New Imperialism* and Ellen Wood’s *Empire of Capital*. The editors of *Historical Materialism* began with the idea that Harvey and Wood might each agree to review the other’s book. The range and importance of the issues raised led us subsequently to widen that discussion and in this issue we print a number of responses to Harvey’s analysis, including that from Ellen Wood, whilst, in a future issue, we will print a number of responses specifically to Wood’s account of what she calls ‘imperial capital’.

Harvey’s account deals with nothing less than the nature of global political economy in the twenty-first century. As such, many issues are raised. Perhaps three stand out. First, there is the thorny question of the state and of the relationship between the state and capital. Interest in Marxist state theory has revived, initially in the context of debates about globalisation and the alleged demise of the nation-state, but now the discussion of imperialism has taken this further. The contributions below point to different ways of approaching the relationship between the state and capital and the possibilities for the emergence of a world state.\(^2\) Harvey borrows from Arrighi and conceptualises capitalist imperialism as arising from ‘a dialectical relation between territorial and capitalistic logics of power. The two logics are distinctive and in no way reducible to each other, but they are tightly interwoven’.\(^3\) What are the strengths and weaknesses of such an approach? Is the former not really subordinated to the latter?

Second there is the issue of oil, its role in the Iraq War, and the nature and status of global geopolitics. Harvey suggests that the occupation of Iraq, and the control of large reserves of this strategic commodity is one way the US can compensate for its declining economic power and so hold off its rivals. The Bush administration’s actions in Iraq are thus designed to send a message to its geopolitical rivals, particularly China. Yet how robust is Harvey’s claim that ‘whoever controls the Middle East controls the global oil spigot and

\(^3\) Harvey 2003, p. 183.
whoever controls the global oil spigot can control the global economy, at least for the near future? How sufficient is this as explanation?

Third is the role of what Harvey calls ‘accumulation by dispossession’ in the current phase of capitalist development. For Harvey, imperialism over the last thirty years reflects a desperate search for surplus-value in the context of a prolonged crisis of overaccumulation. Accumulation by dispossession – the predatory opening up new arenas for accumulation either through selling off state assets in the developed world or forcing developing countries to privatise, commodify and marketise areas of social life that previously resisted the logic of capital – is a major form through which capitalism has sought a ‘spatial fix’ to its crisis tendencies. This has both created vast areas for the absorption of surplus capital and allowed for costs of devaluation to be visited upon the weakest and most vulnerable. But is Harvey’s understanding of these processes adequate? Might it not be too general and all encompassing?

The symposium

Not all the contributions which follow chose to focus solely on the issues raised in The New Imperialism. Some use the opportunity to discuss more broadly David Harvey’s contribution to Marxist scholarship over a period of more than three decades. Noel Castree – after providing a clear summary of the book’s contents which there is no need to repeat here – opts to assess Harvey’s intellectual trajectory more broadly, situating it within the fate of a generation of postwar academic Marxists and the difficulties of being a Marxist public intellectual. His prognosis about the future reproduction of Marxism as a radical current is both thought provoking and pessimistic. He suggests that the legacy of leading figures, many of whom are represented in this symposium (Harvey, Brenner, Fine and Callinicos), ‘may last only a further generation at best’ in the Anglophone world.

Bob Sutcliffe combines a discussion of both Harvey and Wood, contrasting their accounts to each other and to Hardt and Negri’s notion of Empire. He argues that Harvey’s emphasis on capitalism’s crises of overaccumulation understates the extent of recovery in recent years, in particular China’s extraordinary economic growth in the last quarter century. China is not simply

---

4 Harvey 2003, p. 19.
5 For a general treatment of Harvey’s work see Castree and Gregory (eds.) 2006. For a succinct account of his trajectory and influence see Merrifield 2002, Chapter 7.
a site where surplus capital is absorbed and so crisis is held at bay. It is a
dynamic pole of accumulation and economic development in its own right.
A new period of capitalist expansion may well be underway, centred in Asia,
one which will only intensify the difficulties of sustaining US hegemony.

Ellen Wood offers an alternative account from Harvey’s ‘two logics of
power’, based on the centrality of the separation of the economic and political,
which she sees as constitutive of capitalist social-property relations. The state
is critical to the extra-economic reproduction of capitalism and, as capitalism
has become more global than ever before, the state has become more rather
than less important. The fragmentation of political space persists, a global
state is ‘all but inconceivable’ and the organisation of capitalism through
multiple states entails military projects to ensure an international order suited
to capital. Military force is thus an ongoing necessity for ‘imperial capital’ as
are oppositional struggles at the level of the national. For Harvey, in his
response specifically to Wood, this suggests too much detachment of capital
from the state: it suggests ‘placeless capital now roams across the mosaic of
differentiated and unevenly developed nation-states using them at will for
its own nefarious purposes’.

Robert Brenner also takes issue with the distinction between a territorial
and a capitalist logic of power, arguing that Harvey’s own account actually
demonstrates the subordination of the territorial logics to the capitalist logic
of power. For him, the issue of whether or not there is a conflict between the
interests of capital and the interests of states is better addressed through
understanding how the state undertakes the political functions necessary for
the reproduction of capital but that the form the state takes (a system of
multiple national states) is not accounted for by the capital relation itself but
by the historical process through which capitalism emerged from a system
of multiple feudal states, transforming them in the process but not the
multi-state character of the system. A world state would better suit global
capital, however unlikely such an emergence may be.

Sam Ashman and Alex Callinicos are more sympathetic to Harvey’s
distinction between territorial and capitalist logics of power, suggesting that
imperialism be understood as the forms in which geopolitical and economic
competition have become interwoven in modern capitalism. They argue that
this conception of imperialism needs to be supported by a theory of the state
and capital that treats them as interdependent. They too question the catch-
all nature of accumulation by dispossession, suggesting instead that it be
broken down into distinct processes of commodification, recommodification and restructuring.

For Ben Fine, it is not simply that Harvey gives undue empirical weight to accumulation by dispossession but that he gets the dynamic upside down. Fine sees these varied phenomena as a response to the slowing of accumulation and the deadening effect of the predominance of finance, not as the basis of sustaining accumulation. Fine’s tour de force assesses the role of value theory and its current prospects by setting Harvey’s work in the context of understanding method, methodology and value theory and, secondly, in relation to broader developments across the social sciences. Finally, Harvey provides a brief rejoinder to the commentaries.

As all the contributors agree, there is much room for further theoretical development and debate about all of the themes signposted above. We hope that discussion will continue in the pages of Historical Materialism, as well as beyond, as the Left globally strives both to understand and to resist an era marked by neoliberalism and war.

References


The editors of Historical Materialism invited David Harvey and me to comment on each other’s books, no doubt with the hope of generating some lively debate between us. That is fair enough, and I will try to oblige. But there are so many things about which we agree, both in analytical and political terms, that it may prove misleading to concentrate on our differences. That said, thinking through those differences may help to clarify some issues for both of us, and possibly for others too, so let me enter into the spirit of the thing by exploring some of them and tracing what I take to be their implications. This will, of course, oblige me to sketch out my own approach, in contrast to Harvey’s; and while, in the space available here, I can offer no more than a sketch, I should probably also apologise to those who know my work for the inevitable repetitions.

Two logics of power

Harvey begins with a distinction between a ‘logic of territory’ and a ‘logic of capital’, which represent two different ‘logics’ of power. He then analyses capitalist imperialism ‘in terms of the intersection of these two
distinctive but intertwined logics of power’, a relation which is ‘problematic and often contradictory (that is, dialectical)’. This specific brand of imperialism, he suggests, is

a contradictory fusion of ‘the politics of state and empire’ (imperialism as a distinctively political project on the part of actors whose power is based in command of a territory and a capacity to mobilize its human and natural resources towards political, economic, and military ends) and ‘the molecular process of capital accumulation in space and time’ (imperialism as a diffuse political-economic process in space and time in which command over and use of capital takes primacy). Harvey

Having distinguished between the territorial and capitalist logics, Harvey then raises the question of how these different and often divergent impulses can combine to the advantage of capital accumulation. Territorial expansion may, he suggests, have detrimental effects on capitalist accumulation. The political arrangements of empire may place obstacles in the way of accumulation, and, in any case, territorial control is an expensive business. But the accumulation of capital must nevertheless be accompanied by ever-expanding power (in the political sense). He quotes approvingly Hannah Arendt’s argument that ‘[a] never-ending accumulation of property must be based on a never-ending accumulation of power . . . The limitless process of capital accumulation needs the political structure of so “unlimited a Power” that it can protect growing property by constantly growing more powerful’, and this need explains the rise of imperialism. The implication is that global capital accumulation requires global political control, with a ‘political structure’ which plays the same role for global capital that the nation-state plays for national capital.

The history of ‘bourgeois’ Europe, Harvey writes, following Giovanni Arrighi, is therefore a history of ‘ever larger and continuously more expansive power’, as each successive dominant city-state or nation found its political power inadequate to sustain its economic hegemony and was replaced by a larger state with greater power and resources – from the United Provinces to the United Kingdom to the United States. It follows, continues Harvey, that ‘any hegemon, if it is to maintain its position in relation to endless

\[1 \] Harvey 2003, p. 30.
\[3 \] Harvey 2003, p. 34.
capital accumulation, must endlessly seek to extend, expand, and intensify its power; and if it proves impossible to construct this ever vaster accumulation of political power, then endless capital accumulation will likely dissolve into chaos, ending the era of capital not with a revolutionary bang but in tortured anarchy.

Harvey’s argument, then, proceeds from the often contradictory relation between the political and economic ‘logics’ of capitalism – and, here, an immediate problem arises. When he writes that ‘[t]he fundamental point is to see the territorial and capitalist logics of power as distinct from each other’ and to understand that they ‘frequently tug against each other, sometimes to the point of outright antagonism’, it is not clear precisely which distinction and which contradiction he really has in mind.

On the one hand, his argument revolves largely around the proposition that endless capital accumulation requires endless accumulation of political power. But, if this constitutes a ‘contradiction’, it is only in the weak sense that capital’s need for endless political expansion inevitably comes into conflict with capital’s resistance to the costs involved or finds itself impeded by the political apparatus of imperial domination. On the other hand, there is a stronger claim: that there are two distinct imperial logics, one having to do with the economic processes of capital accumulation, and the other, a ‘distinctively political project’ pursued by ‘actors whose power is based in command of a territory and a capacity to mobilize its human and natural resources towards political, economic, and military ends’. This suggests two quite distinct imperial drives: the drive for capital accumulation conducted by capitalists or those acting in their interests, and a different imperial drive for territorial and political expansion conducted by ‘actors’ with motivations, interests and sources of power different from those of capitalists – actors similar, perhaps, to those who in precapitalist societies stood to gain directly from state power and the possibilities it offered for appropriation in the form of tax or tribute. This territorial logic, in other words, is fundamentally indistinguishable from what drives precapitalist imperialism, and, in that sense, can be understood as contrary to capitalist impulses: ‘What sets
imperialism of the capitalist sort apart from other conceptions of empire is that it is the capitalist logic that typically dominates, though . . . there are times in which the territorial logic comes to the fore. This formulation does suggest a more fundamental contradiction; but, while it seems to weigh heavily in Harvey’s theoretical schema, it plays no obviously necessary role in his empirical analysis of history or of the present conjuncture. It can even be argued that his own account of imperialism contradicts this definition of the political logic.

In the argument that follows here, I shall concentrate on the first proposition – that endless capital accumulation requires the endless accumulation of political power – on the assumption that it is the most central to Harvey’s analysis. But readers will notice that, in laying out my own approach, I try to offer an alternative not only to the latter proposition but also to the more abstractly theoretical distinction between the two logics as Harvey presents it.

My own argument in Empire of Capital proceeds from the formal separation of the ‘political’ and ‘economic’ in capitalism and its effects on the role of the state in capital accumulation. I go on to characterise capitalist imperialism by exploring the relation between the economic power of surplus appropriation and the extra-economic powers of administration and enforcement which support it. The boundless expansion of capital is possible because of its unique ability to detach itself from ‘extra-economic’ power, while that same detachment makes it both possible and necessary for capital to rely on the support of ‘extra-economic’ powers external to itself, in the form of territorially-limited legal, political and military organisations. Global capital is served not by a global state but by a global system of multiple territorial states; and the ‘new imperialism’ is not about an ever-expanding political structure to match the scope of capital accumulation but about the complex relation between the economic reach of capital and the territorial states which organise and enforce its global hegemony.

My own view of the relation between economic and political power in capitalism is, in some respects, diametrically opposed to Harvey’s. While he

---

7 Harvey 2003, p. 33.
8 Bob Brenner, in his contribution to this issue, argues that Harvey’s own account of the evidence contradicts his insistence on the autonomy of the political logic and is entirely consistent with the more conventional view that political power acts in response to the demands of capital accumulation.

9 Wood 2005.
argues that ever-expanding capital accumulation must be accompanied by an ever-expanding political power and command over territory, and that this is the logic of capitalist imperialism, I argue almost the reverse: the specificity of capitalist imperialism lies in the unique capacity of capital to impose its hegemony without expanding its territorial political power. In all other forms of empire, the scope of hegemony depended directly on the reach of geopolitical and military force. Capitalism alone has created an autonomously economic form of domination.

So, Harvey starts from the premise that capital needs to ‘expand geographic control’, preferably in the form of territorial dominion. It is true, he writes, that the most recent imperial hegemon, the USA, has devised a distinctive form of imperialism, which nominally recognises the independence of the countries over which it exercises hegemony. But this brand of imperialism still conforms to his basic rule, because it is, in his view, largely an ideological cover, adopted principally for domestic reasons, partly to preserve the capacities of domestic consumption but above all to disguise the same imperial ambitions that drove the territorial colonial empires of classic imperialism. By contrast, I argue that the US is the first truly capitalist empire precisely because it is the first imperial hegemon to possess the kind of economic power needed to dispense with territorial ambitions and to sustain its hegemony through the economic imperatives of capitalism – though, as I shall argue in a moment, this has been accompanied by new ‘extra-economic’ and especially military requirements. The invention of ‘open-door’ imperialism was not just an ideological subterfuge or a second-best alternative imposed on the US by recalcitrant anti-colonial sentiment at home. It was the preferred option of a power capable of sustaining its hegemony without incurring the costs and risks of direct political rule or territorial control. After the US had completed its westward expansion on its own continent, coercively displacing the indigenous population, it generally preferred a so-called ‘informal’ empire, without colonial rule.

Had the previous capitalist hegemon, Britain, been able in the nineteenth century to continue exploiting India as a commercial resource, without resorting to direct colonial rule and military despotism, it would almost certainly have done so. As it was, there was strong resistance in the British state and ruling classes to the East India Company’s transformation of the Empire from a commercial resource into a tribute-extracting imperialism of a precapitalist kind. Whatever controversy there may be about the ultimate profitability of
the Empire in India (and there is ample evidence of its net disadvantages to
the British economy as a whole, if not to some specific economic interests),
it cannot be denied that its conversion into a territorial empire was a very
cumbersome and costly business. Harvey himself suggests that Britain gained
more from superiority in open trade than from the Empire in India. Nor is
it insignificant that Britain very profitably enjoyed the benefits of its own
‘informal’ or ‘free’ empire, in Canada, Australia and Latin America, and its
massive investments in territories not directly controlled by the Empire.10
If anything, the drive for colonial expansion in the classic age of imperialism,
as Eric Hobsbawm has argued,

seems to have been proportionately stronger in economically less dynamic
metropolitan countries, where it served to some extent as a potential
compensation for their economic and political inferiority to their rivals –
and in the case of France, her demographic and military inferiority.11
For the main industrial powers, Germany and the US, ‘formal colonisation’
was ‘not a major aspect’ of global economic expansion; and even Britain’s
imperial purpose by then ‘was not expansion but defence against others
encroaching on territories hitherto . . . dominated by British trade and British
capital’.12 Today – as, indeed, before – it cannot even be said that capital
requires control of colonial territories in order to absorb excess capital, especially
since investment still goes predominantly from one advanced capitalist
economy to another.
If we are looking for the contradictions in capitalist imperialism, it seems
to me we will not find them in an unmet need for political power and territorial
control co-extensive with the geographic scope of capital accumulation. Nor
will we find them simply in the tensions between capital accumulation and
the costs of maintaining political dominion; and we shall certainly not find
them in an antagonistic relation between capital accumulation and some
precapitalist drive for territorial expansion. The contradictions are even more
contradictory than that. But, to explicate them, at least as I understand them,
requires going back a few steps.

10 Hobsbawm 1989, p. 75.
11 Hobsbawm 1989, p. 76.
12 Hobsbawm 1989, p. 75.
The political and the economic

Let us return to Harvey’s first definitions. His principal distinction is between, on the one hand, an imperialism based on control of capital, and on the other hand, ‘the politics of state and empire’, that is,

imperialism as a distinctively political project on the part of actors whose power is based in command of a territory and a capacity to mobilize its human and natural resources towards political, economic, and military ends.

Leaving aside the logic of capital for a moment, I agree that there is such a thing as imperialism of the ‘political’ kind, with the characteristics he describes, and that this is distinct from capital accumulation. But, for me, this ‘political’ form of imperialism, in which exploitation of colonial peoples and resources depends on political domination and direct command of territory, is the essence of pre-capitalist empires. This is not to deny that capitalist powers have engaged in colonial ventures, especially in earlier days. Nor is it to deny that even today there may be circumstances in which territorial command will be exercised for specifically capitalist purposes. But the development of capitalism has produced a different kind of imperialism, which does not depend on direct political rule or territorial command.

Capitalist exploitation certainly requires political supports, but the political ‘logic’ has been transformed by the social relations of capitalism. The function of the ‘political’ in supporting capitalism’s economic mode of exploitation is very different from its role in precapitalist societies. In such societies, where surplus extraction was achieved by means of direct coercion in the form of legal, political or military domination, the ‘political’ had a direct role in surplus appropriation. So, for instance, in many precapitalist states, the powers of appropriation depended on direct possession of the state, or some piece of it, in the form of state office and the access to taxation that this offered. In other cases, the power of appropriation derived from the performance of certain judicial, political or military functions, or from some kind of legal privilege. In feudalism, appropriating powers depended on the legal, political and military status of lordship. The economic powers of the feudal lord and the tax/office state reached only as far as their political power. To put it another way, property in such societies was ‘politically constituted’ (in Robert Brenner’s illuminating phrase). Precapitalist imperialism followed the same logic, extending extra-economic appropriation – for instance, through seizure of territory or extraction of tribute. This means that accumulation of property
and accumulation of political power were indeed as inextricably bound up with one another as Arendt and Harvey suggest; and economic appropriation did indeed require a political power to match. But this was so precisely because these societies were not capitalist.

In capitalism, property exists independently of political power, and the principal role of the ‘political’ is essentially external to the process of appropriation. The expropriation of the direct producer means that appropriators have no need for the kind of direct political power that served previous exploiting classes as a means of surplus extraction. While feudal property entailed the political power of lordship – a power of appropriation inseparable from legal, political and military functions – in capitalism control of property means that direct command of the legal, political and military apparatus is no longer necessary, and exploitation is not bound up with the performance of any public or communal function. Political power, in the shape of a state that stands apart from private property, is certainly an essential means of protecting the system of property, maintaining social order and the conditions for accumulation; but capital does not itself directly wield such power as a means of extracting surplus labour from workers. As in every other exploitative system, there are two ‘moments’ of exploitation: the appropriation of surplus labour and the coercive power that sustains it. What distinguishes capitalism is that these two ‘moments’ are uniquely separate from each other.

Capitalism has, then, transformed the political sphere in various ways. To speak of the separation of the political and economic in capitalism means not only that there is an autonomous economic sphere such as never existed before but also that there is a distinctive kind of political sphere. One way of characterising the ‘political’ in capitalism is to say that many of the functions formerly belonging to some kind of public power or communal authority have been vested in private property and transferred to a separate economic sphere. Many aspects of social life have been placed outside the reach of political power and subjected to the economic dominance of capital; and, in modern ‘democracies’, this means their removal from the reach of democratic accountability. An important corollary is that, while the appropriating class has lost direct political power in the public sense, and with it many forms of personal control over the lives of producing classes outside the production process, the organisation of production is directly in the hands of the appropriating class in unprecedented ways.
The autonomous ‘economic’ sphere has, in other words, created new forms of domination. In capitalism, both appropriators and producers are dependent on the market for the basic conditions of their self-reproduction; and the relation between them is mediated by the market. Workers work to produce the profits of capital because they cannot work even to satisfy their own needs without producing capitalist profit. They cannot gain access to the means of their own life and self-reproduction, or even the means of labour itself, without selling their labour-power in exchange for a wage. So the domination to which they are subject is rooted in their market-dependence. The fact that capitalists too are market-dependent (for access to capital and labour) and subject to impersonal market imperatives – the imperatives of competition and accumulation that drive the capitalist system – does not put capital on a level with labour. On the contrary, market imperatives compel capital to maximise profit by extracting ever more surplus value from labour; and capital’s position in the market gives it a new form of domination over workers. So, the market relation between the two classes does not diminish but reinforces the relationship of domination. And that is quite apart from capital’s capacity to manipulate markets.

Capitalist imperialism extends this purely economic mode of exploitation beyond national borders, relying on, indeed imposing and enforcing, the market-dependence of subordinate economies. Global capital can accumulate by ‘economic’ means, as these economies are drawn into the orbit of the global market and become subject to economic pressures emanating from the major capitalist powers. To the extent that this kind of exploitation does not require direct territorial control or political domination of colonial people by imperial states, it might be argued that this is not ‘imperialism’ in any meaningful sense. I do see the point of reserving the word for exploitative relations that involve direct political and territorial domination; but I am inclined to say that, if we are reluctant to use the term imperialism to describe the specifically economic domination engendered by capitalism, we may have trouble describing relations between capital and labour as class relations, since they differ from precapitalist forms of class exploitation in much the same way that capitalist imperialism differs from earlier empires. In both cases, extra-economic forms of direct domination, for the purpose of exploitative appropriation, are supplanted by economic forms operating through the medium of the market. In the absence of a better word, I shall continue to speak of capitalism’s distinctive economic imperialism.
What is most unique about the capitalist relation between the economic and the political, then, is not capital’s need for endless accumulation of political power, but, rather, the unique capacity of economic power to detach itself from direct political coercion. The economic sphere in capitalism has its own forms of coercion, which enable exploitation and capital accumulation without directly relying on extra-economic force. On the global level, in the arena of the global market, this economic sphere can expand on its own without extending the territorial reach of political power or of an imperial state. There may be occasions when capitalist states will seek to extend their political control for various geopolitical reasons, but the process of globalising capitalist economic power does not depend on the reach of political domination. This means not only that capitalism has created a new form of domination but also that economic hegemony can reach far beyond the scope of direct political power or territorial control. In fact, capital’s capacity for relentless self-expansion depends on this detachment. That is the unique strength of capitalism, but it is also the source of new contradictions.

**Primitive accumulation and ‘accumulation by dispossession’**

I will come back to those contradictions later. First, there is another step in Harvey’s argument that may clarify the differences between us, his discussion of ‘primitive accumulation’, which plays a vital role in his account of contemporary imperialism. Here, again, Harvey cites Arendt, who speaks of the ‘original sin of simple robbery, which centuries ago had made possible “the original accumulation of capital” (Marx) and had started all further accumulation’ but which had to be repeated later ‘lest the motor of accumulation suddenly die down’. These processes, according to Arendt, constitute the means of capital accumulation through imperialism; and Harvey goes on to develop her argument in his conception of ‘accumulation by dispossession’. He suggests that he is building on Marx’s own conception of ‘primitive’ or ‘original’ accumulation, but he criticises Marx for having too limited a view of these processes. In particular, he argues, Marx shared certain initial assumptions with classical political economy, which

---

13 Harvey 2003, p. 142.
relegate accumulation based upon predation, fraud, and violence to an ‘original stage’ that is considered no longer relevant or, as with Luxemburg, as being somehow ‘outside of capitalism’ as a closed system.\textsuperscript{14}

Such processes of ‘accumulation by dispossession’, Harvey insists, have continued to be part of imperialism throughout the capitalist era and are again taking centre-stage in the ‘new’ imperialism, especially in the form of privatisation in subordinate economies.

Now, on the face of it, there is little here with which to disagree. Yet, on closer consideration, there may be a significant difference between Harvey’s understanding of ‘primitive accumulation’ and my own; and this may affect how we understand the ‘new imperialism’. I may be reading too much into Harvey’s observation that Marx was ‘following Adam Smith’ in his conception of primitive accumulation. There is certainly no doubt that Marx proceeded from Smith and other classical political economists in developing his own argument about the conditions for the emergence of capitalism. But my impression is that Harvey is attributing to Marx a conception not fundamentally different from Smith’s; and that, while Harvey objects to classical political economy’s conception of this process as belonging only to the prehistory of capitalism, he fundamentally shares Smith’s understanding of the process itself.

I understand the situation differently. First, it seems to me that the conception of ‘primitive accumulation’ represents one of the most significant ruptures between Marx and classical political economy. It is not for nothing that he refers to the classical notion as the \textit{so-called} primitive accumulation. His intention is to dissociate himself from the idea, as it appears in Smith and others. Classical political economy suggests that capitalism, or a mature ‘commercial society’, emerges when a critical mass of wealth has been accumulated, enabling investment. Marx, by contrast, insists that no amount of accumulation, whether from outright theft, imperialism, commercial profit, or even the exploitation of labour for commercial profit, will by itself constitute capital or give rise to capitalism. Capital, as he defines it, is not just any kind of wealth but a specific social relation. While no doubt some concentration of wealth is necessary, the essential precondition of capitalism is a transformation of social-property relations, which sets in train distinctive imperatives of competition, profit-maximisation, the \textit{compulsion} to reinvest

\textsuperscript{14} Harvey 2003, p. 144.
surpluses, and the need to improve labour productivity by developing the forces of production. The real ‘primitive accumulation’ (and even the term itself may be misleading) is the expropriation of the agricultural producer, particularly as it occurred in sixteenth-century England, where landlords increasingly derived rents from the commercial profits of tenants, while many small producers were dispossessed and became wage-labourers. This dispossession was significant not simply because it allowed for a concentration of wealth in the hands of larger proprietors, which they could then re-invest, but because it created a new social relation between appropriators and producers which imposed new imperatives and new ‘rules for reproduction’ on them, including a growing compulsion to reinvest surpluses to maximise profits, in particular by enhancing labour productivity. The origin of capitalism is not rooted in the concentration of wealth. It has to do with the imposition of market imperatives, often by coercive means and always by painful social transformations.

For that matter, even if Marx believed that some degree of wealth was a precondition of capitalist development, it would be reasonable to ask how substantial he thought the concentrations had to be to allow the emergence of capitalism. After all, he credits England alone with having the ‘classic form’ of the real ‘primitive accumulation’; and this took place at a time when England’s wealth was very modest in comparison to, say, Spain’s. What happened in England which had occurred nowhere else was not the accumulation of wealth but a transformation of social property relations that set in train new imperatives of competition and accumulation. In that sense, capital accumulation, in the specific sense Marx has in mind, is a result rather than a cause of capitalist imperatives.

It seems to me that Harvey’s conception of ‘primitive accumulation’ may be closer to Smith’s than to Marx’s. Although he has a very nuanced view of the process – which, in his definition, certainly includes expropriation of direct producers – his emphasis appears to be on the concentration of wealth rather than on the transformation of social property relations. This may also help to explain his criticism of Marx. If it is true that Marx devotes his attention to the original ‘accumulation’ and not to later instances, it is because he invokes the concept precisely in his explanation of the origin of capitalism and its specific imperatives. This is in sharp contrast to the classical notion, which sees no need to explicate the specificity of capitalist imperatives, taking for granted the drive to accumulation and treating ‘commercial society’ as
simply a quantitative advance on what went before. For Marx, the critical task is to identify the specific dynamics of capitalism, in a way his predecessors never did, in order to explicate how capitalist accumulation differs from other forms of appropriation, and to explain the historical rupture that brought it about.

It is the new systemic and historical dynamic of capitalism that explains the subsequent development of capitalist imperialism as a distinctive form. It is true that Marx examined the specific dynamic of capitalism by looking at it more or less abstractly as a self-enclosed system; but though he did not himself systematically explore its effects on imperialist expansion, his account of the capitalist dynamic clearly laid the foundation for others to do so. The point is not that he relegated ‘accumulation based upon predation, fraud, and violence’ to an ‘original stage’ but that this kind of accumulation, to the extent that it remains an essential feature of capitalist imperialism, has a new logic, which is a consequence and not a cause of a dynamic specific to capitalism. It is not simply a matter of repeated exercises in the seizure and concentration of wealth but, more fundamentally, of the continuing imposition, maintenance and intensification of market imperatives. To be sure, theft, fraud and violence continue; but what enables capital to exploit economies throughout the globe in its own distinctive ways is the subjection of ever more spheres of human life everywhere to market-dependence and the imperatives that go with it. That is what dispossession under capitalism is fundamentally about.

Here, we encounter a problem in the major Marxist theories of imperialism, which were devised to analyse the classic ‘age of empire’ in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Harvey begins his discussion of accumulation by dispossession with a quotation from Rosa Luxemburg, outlining the ‘dual character’ of capital accumulation:

One concerns the commodity market and the place where surplus value is produced – the factory, the mine, the agricultural estate. Regarded in this light accumulation is a purely economic process, with its most important phase a transaction between the capitalist and the wage labourer. This kind of exploitation takes place, Luxemburg points out, among formally equal individuals;

---

15 Cited in Harvey 2003, p. 137.
and the keen dialectics of scientific analysis were required to reveal how the right of ownership changes in the course of accumulation into appropriation of other people’s property, how commodity exchange turns into exploitation, and equality becomes class rule.

The other aspect of capital accumulation ‘concerns the relations between capitalism and the non-capitalist modes of production’. In this case, the relations of domination and exploitation are transparent:

> Force, fraud, oppression, looting are openly displayed without any attempt at concealment, and it requires an effort to discover within this tangle of political violence and contests of power the stern laws of the economic process.

It is clearly right to draw a distinction between the ‘purely economic process’ of accumulation and accumulation by the extra-economic means of force and fraud. What is more problematic about Luxemburg’s formulation is the suggestion that imperialism belongs squarely to the second aspect of accumulation. It is true that this formulation may not accurately reflect her own understanding of capitalist imperialism, because she certainly understood the ways in which capital could even then impose its exploitative power on the international plane by purely economic means. But there can be little doubt that classical-Marxist theories of imperialism in general had more to do with territorial imperialism than with a form of domination analogous to capitalist class exploitation, a ‘purely economic process’ which, like capitalist class relations, ‘concerns the commodity market’ and also lacks the transparency of precapitalist imperialism.

There is, of course, nothing surprising about this at a time when imperial relations really did take the form of interactions between a fairly small capitalist core and a predominantly non-capitalist world; in which capitalist powers exploited non-capitalist territories largely by means of looting, violence, oppression and fraud; and interimperialist rivalries really did take the form of struggles over the division and redivision of the non-capitalist world. The question is how far we can get with a theoretical distinction between the two aspects of accumulation in analysing a world in which the economic imperatives of capitalism encompass the globe, in ways and degrees unforeseen by the great Marxist theorists of imperialism.

Harvey’s objective is clearly to modify Luxemburg’s theory to comprehend the realities of universal capitalism. He begins by objecting to her understanding
of capitalist crisis, which she attributes to underconsumption. The problem, he argues, is not underconsumption but overaccumulation. He also modifies her view of capitalism’s need to exploit ‘something “outside of itself”’ in the form of non-capitalist formations in order to stabilise itself. Although there is, he says, an ‘inside-outside dialectic’, and capitalism does indeed require something ‘outside of itself’ in order to permit and absorb accumulation, the exploitation of already existing non-capitalist formations is not the only way to make use of the ‘other’. Capitalism can repeatedly ‘manufacture’ the ‘other’ in order to solve the problem of overaccumulation – as it does, for instance, when, in the absence of already existing reserves of labour outside the proletariat, in particular peasants, it can repeatedly create a reserve of unemployed workers, which tends to drive down wages and ‘thereby opens up new opportunities for profitable deployment of capital’.\footnote{Harvey 2003, p. 141.} The ‘inside-outside’ dialectic, and the creation of the ‘other’, can be reproduced in various ways, by one or another form of dispossession.

At the same time, Harvey’s argument proceeds from Luxemburg’s distinction between the two aspects of capitalist accumulation, an ‘economic’ process and another, different kind of process that depends on ‘extra-economic’ force. Here again, I obviously have no objection to this distinction in itself; but it seems to me that Harvey is sometimes inclined to elide the transformation of social-property relations into the concentration of wealth by means of force and fraud. While he certainly includes in his analysis a wide variety of means, from outright expropriation to dispossession in the form of privatisation, it is, I think, significant that these processes are presented not as means of imposing economic imperatives but rather as extra-economic processes of theft – something like Hannah Arendt’s ‘simple robbery’. In Harvey’s account, accumulation by dispossession seems to be less about the creation or maintenance of social-property relations which generate market compulsions than about the redistribution of assets to enable investment – what I have, in other contexts, called market opportunities rather than market imperatives.

**Two logics revisited**

Why does this matter? In a sense, it does not, because Harvey’s theoretical propositions are not necessarily reflected in his empirical analysis. In any
case, the relevant processes are all there in his account. Not only old forms of force and fraud but new forms of dispossession by means of privatisation are encompassed by his theory of accumulation by dispossession. Harvey may emphasise the importance of extra-economic coercion; but he certainly recognises, indeed insists, that capital stands to gain most not from the direct suppression of colonial territories but from a continual opening to capital. Britain, he suggests, gained more from the open dynamic of the Atlantic trade than from the colonial oppression of India, and the same open dynamic allowed the USA eventually to displace British hegemony. While we may question whether these cases exemplify the importance of political power more than of economic imperatives, it is certainly true that the dynamic of trade could be ‘open’ only under certain political and territorial dispensations, placing it outside the political reach of Europe’s ‘closed’ empires. And there can be no doubt that some kind of political power is necessary to impose market imperatives and to expand their sphere of operation.

But there is another way of formulating the contradictions of capitalist imperialism, which may or may not be consistent with Harvey’s argument but which, in any case, is the one I would favour. It requires us, first, to acknowledge the specificities of capitalism and its particular form of appropriation, as distinct from other social formations. This means that we would also be obliged to recognise the distinctive role of the ‘political’ in a system where property itself is not ‘politically constituted’ and appropriation takes place by ‘economic’ means. The specific ‘political’ logic of capitalist imperialism would then be something other than the drive for territorial expansion, the direct command of territory, or the appropriation of surpluses by extra-economic means, whether in the form of pillage, tax or tribute. Extra-economic power would certainly be treated as essential to capital accumulation, but its principal functions would be the imposition, maintenance and enforcement of social-property relations conducive to the exertion of economic power; the creation of a predictable social and administrative order of the kind that capitalism needs more than any other social form; and, in general, the provision of conditions congenial to accumulation. Any contradictions between the two ‘logics’ of power would not take the form of a tension between two distinct imperial drives; and, while these contradictions would certainly arise from the relation between the economic powers of capital and the political powers of the territorial entities that serve them, that relation is not adequately conveyed by Arendt’s rule that endless capital accumulation
requires an endless accumulation of political power. On the contrary, the contradictions would emanate from capital's unique ability to distance itself from political power.

I will not here repeat what I have said elsewhere about these contradictions, except to emphasise one or two essential points as they relate to capitalist imperialism. If the essential role of the state in capitalism is not to serve as an instrument of appropriation, or a form of ‘politically constituted property’, but rather as a means of creating and sustaining the conditions of accumulation at arms length, maintaining the social, legal and administrative order necessary to accumulation, this is true of the state’s role not only in the domestic economy but also in capitalist imperialism. Just as domestic capital requires order on the national plane, the global expansion of capital requires the maintenance of order and conditions of accumulation on a global scale.

But here wholly new problems arise, because the necessary order requires a degree of supervision incompatible with the global scope of capital accumulation. The economic reach of capital may be global; but a truly global state, which can offer the kind of minute and reliable administration capital needs, is all but inconceivable. It is also true that global capital benefits in various ways from the unevenness of national economies and from the control of labour mobility, which also argues in favour of territorial states to enclose and control these economic fragments. In other words, global capital needs a fragmentation of political space.

I should, perhaps, concede that the impossibility of a global state to match global capital is not something that can be grasped entirely on the theoretical plane. To a large extent, this proposition is a lower-level practical observation about the insurmountable difficulty of sustaining on a large geographical scale the close regulation and predictability capital needs. That said, it remains true that the very possibility of a contradiction between the global scale of capital and the territorial limits of the state is something specific to capitalism, and this can indeed be captured theoretically.

In any case, the more global the economy has become, the more economic circuits have been organised by territorial states and inter-state relations; and capital has come to rely more than ever on territorial states to install and enforce the conditions of accumulation on a global scale. For instance, global capital today depends on local states throughout the world to operate its neoliberal strategies. It is certainly true that capital has made use of new transnational organisations to facilitate its navigation of the global economy,
and territorial states themselves have also had to respond to the needs of
global capital. But, if anything, the political logic of capitalism has reinforced
the fragmentation of the global system into territorial entities, instead of
creating some kind of global state.

So the political form of global capitalism is not a global state but a global
system of multiple territorial states; and this creates its own distinctive
contradictions. We are only now beginning to see their implications. The
division of labour between political and economic power, between capital
and state, was more or less manageable, as long as the reach of economic
hegemony was more or less the same as the reach of the national state. But
today, there is a growing distance between the economic reach of capital
and the scope of political power. While it is possible to envisage a redrawing of
current territorial boundaries, with increasing regionalisation on the one hand
and localisation on the other, I cannot imagine any existing or conceivable
form of ‘global governance’ providing the degree of order and regularity that
capital needs.

This means that states operating on behalf of global capital have to organise
not only their own domestic social order but the international order among
states. It is no longer a matter of capturing this or that bit of territory, dominating
this or that subject people, defeating this or that imperial rival. The new
imperial project depends on policing the whole global system of states and
ensuring that imperial capital can safely and profitably navigate throughout
that global system. But, since there is no single overarching global state with
power to transcend and control all national entities, there are, again, wholly
new contradictions.

In particular, the extra-economic force required to maintain a global order
congenial to capital must, in the absence of a global state, be exercised by
territorial states. These territorial states must, in turn, be policed to guarantee
an international order congenial to the movements of capital; but, since this
cannot be done by a global political power, the organisation of multiple states
is largely a military project. The military policy of the major capitalist states
since the end of World War Two has been based on the assumption that what
is required to maintain a stable and orderly system of multiple states is one
overwhelmingly preponderant military power. It has been a central plank of
US foreign policy since at least the 1940s, and certainly long before the current
Bush régime, to ensure the unassailable predominance of US military power;
and, in general, this principle has been accepted by its major allies among the advanced capitalist states.

This is the setting in which a George W. Bush is possible – and at a time when the relative decline of US economic power has made its military supremacy that much more important. If Bush has mobilised this force in ways unlike his predecessors, and if his imperial project goes beyond anything envisaged by them, he has been able to pursue it only because the foundations – infrastructural and ideological – had already been laid by previous administrations. Discontinuities there certainly have been, but there are also essential underlying continuities, grounded in the fundamental contradictions of capitalist imperialism.

A single territorial power policing the whole global system for capital by military means is, from the start, a contradictory and dangerous project. The most obvious point is that the particular interests of one nation-state and its own national capitals will inevitably take precedence over all others. But perhaps the most problematic aspect of the new imperialist militarism is that its military objectives are by nature open-ended. Earlier imperial projects were easier to fathom because their purposes and scope were relatively well-defined, whether it was to capture territory, resources and slaves, to monopolise trade routes, or simply to defeat a rival. In the case of the ‘new’ imperialism, where the object of military force is less to achieve a specific result than to oversee the whole global system and to assert a general predominance, it is not surprising to see military adventures with no identifiable purpose, scope or exit strategy; and since the territorial limitations of the hegemonic state mean that its military power cannot be everywhere at once, the ‘demonstration effect’ becomes especially important. Bush’s military policy of endless war, without any limits of time or geography, only takes to extremes the logic of the open-ended militarism already inherent in the contradictions of the new imperialism.

The madness of the war in Iraq, for instance, is probably inexplicable without reference to this distinctive military logic. Oil is not enough to explain it. As many commentators have pointed out, oil-producing countries have no interest in withholding their prize commodity from those who can afford to buy it, and US access to Middle-East oil markets has never been in serious danger. Even if we assume that oil reserves in the not too distant future will be severely limited and that therefore today’s (and tomorrow’s) major powers
are seeking to establish control of strategic oil producing regions, the US strategic position in the Gulf, or even its capacity to control the access of others to oil, did not require the invasion of Iraq or the overthrow of Saddam Hussein. It is even possible that the chaos engendered by the invasion of Iraq has made matters worse for the US. But the overarching open-ended military project of the new imperialism can always make a case for war, when other, more precise objectives by themselves are not enough and even when there are powerful arguments against it. In the light of this project, it is even possible – as I think was the case in Iraq – that the target of military force will be selected not because it represents a threat but, on the contrary, because it represents no threat at all and hence appears a likely candidate pour encourager les autres at relatively little risk to the aggressor. What may seem inexplicable in relation to any specific objectives may make some kind of perverted sense when the primary purpose is to ‘shock and awe’ the world – even if this kind of perversion, with all the instabilities it generates, is likely to be self-defeating.

The new imperialism and oppositional struggles

I have tried to identify the differences between Harvey’s approach and my own, having to do with the role of the political in capitalist imperialism. Harvey insists on capital’s need for ever-expanding political power to support endless accumulation, which means that capitalism must constantly set in motion the non-capitalist logic of political and territorial expansion and the obstacles to capital accumulation that inevitably come with it. At the same time, the ultimate problem for capital would be the failure to accumulate enough political power. For me, the main contradiction derives from capital’s unique ability to detach itself from political power and territorial boundaries because of a very specific division of labour between economic and extra-economic power grounded in capitalist property relations. It is not only the relation between the political logic and the logic of accumulation that is specific to capitalism but the new political logic itself.

How does this difference manifest itself in our analyses of imperialism? One distinction, as I suggested earlier, appears in our characterisation of the classic ‘age of empire’. But beyond that, the picture is rather more cloudy. I am frankly uncertain whether my argument means that I simply disagree

17 On the latter two points, see Brenner’s contribution to this issue.
with Harvey’s way of arriving at conclusions on which we fundamentally agree, or whether our conclusions themselves are different enough to require some explanation. One important point about which I am unsure is whether we disagree about the role of the state in today’s imperialism and what this means for oppositional struggle.

A glance at what each of us has to say about the development of imperialism – and this means essentially US imperialism – after World War Two does not immediately suggest any serious differences. We both, for instance, talk about the changes that took place in the 1970s, as the interests of US capital shifted from the promotion of ‘development’ strategies during the long postwar boom, to neoliberalism during the downturn. Both of us regard privatisation as the ‘cutting edge’ of the second phase. So, do the theoretical/historical differences between us really have any substantial implications for analysing our contemporary world?

I am not sure I can answer that question decisively, but let me just try to think it through by tracing the connection between Harvey’s assumptions about the relation between the two logics of power and his conclusions about accumulation by dispossession. On the face of it, the connection seems fairly straightforward: endless accumulation requires an endless expansion of political power to achieve the kind of geographic control that enables strategies of accumulation such as dispossession. But, as soon as I formulate the argument this way, I find it hard to distinguish the new imperialism from, say, the dynamics of the Roman Empire. ‘No administration in history’, writes a distinguished historian of ancient Rome, ‘has ever devoted itself so whole-heartedly to fleecing its subjects for the private benefit of its ruling class as Rome of the last age of the Republic’ – that is, the age of imperial expansion.18 The process of expansion was transparently a land-grabbing operation – unparalleled in ancient history – to extend the accumulation of property in the hands of the Roman ruling class beyond the borders of Rome or even Roman Italy; and it was clearly a process of dispossession, not only of colonial subjects but of the peasantry at home. While other ancient empires had certainly used extra-economic force, political and military, to extract surpluses on a large scale from subject peoples in the form of tax and tribute, there was nothing like Rome’s overriding preoccupation with private property and the use of military power to acquire it.

18 Badian 1968, p. 87.
Of course, the accumulation of property in the Roman manner was not driven by the specific imperatives of capital accumulation, and this alone is enough to distinguish it from capitalist imperialism. But it is not entirely clear in Harvey’s argument how those imperatives differ from any other drive to amass private wealth. Nor is it entirely clear how the role of political and military power in capital accumulation differs from its function in non-capitalist forms of acquisition. For that matter, since the Roman ruling classes, having created an imperial state to serve their own interests, eventually began to see that state as a burdensome nuisance, it is not immediately obvious how this tension differs from the contradiction between the political and economic logics of capitalism as Harvey describes them.

Yet, surely, there are differences, and something significant follows from them. Rome, in its transition from small republic to massive empire, was certainly an expansionist state above all else, and its ruling class has had few equals in history for sheer greed and ‘possessive individualism’. But, unlike its capitalist counterparts, neither state nor ruling class was driven by the economic requirements of competition, the need for ‘maximising’ strategies to meet those requirements, the compulsion to improve the forces of production and increase labour productivity, and the constant drive for the self-expansion of capital that goes with them – all the imperatives that derive from capitalist social-property relations. Nor was there anything comparable to the kind of domination by economic means that permits accumulation without direct coercive force. What Rome in its expansionist phase did have was a ruling class consisting effectively of warlords – the senatorial class of propertied aristocrats who directly commanded both state and military power – which could be mobilised for the purpose of accumulating property. The organisation of the propertied class directly as a political and military machine for private accumulation fundamentally distinguishes Roman imperialism from any capitalist empire, in which the primary mode of accumulation is ‘economic’ – conducted by dominant classes without direct access to extra-economic power – and where political and military power are exercised at arms length from the process of accumulation.

This means, among other things, that the idea of privatisation as practised by the new imperialism would, by definition, be incomprehensible in the context of Roman imperialism or in any context other than the empire of capital. This kind of dispossession is something different from the simple transfer of property away from its original possessors into the hands of a
superior power. It is, in its essence, a way of detaching property from any public or communal power, in order to make it entirely subject to the purely economic force of capital. This also means that the role played by extra-economic power in sustaining this process must be correspondingly different.

What I am outlining here is certainly not news to Harvey; and, at this point, I am generally inclined to say that our disagreements have less to do with our conclusions than with our means of reaching them. But I do hesitate on one important issue, which may follow from what I have just said; so let me state it briefly. I have some doubts about Harvey’s observations on oppositional struggle. I would place rather more emphasis on the possibilities of, and need for, struggle at the level of the territorial state; and, while I think any local or national struggle must look beyond its narrow boundaries, I am less confident than Harvey seems to be about the efficacy of transnational struggles as conducted by those anti-globalisation movements whose principal targets are transnational instruments of capital such as the IMF or the G8. Whether this difference (if, indeed, it is one) necessarily follows from our theoretical differences is hard to say, but I can venture a tentative suggestion.

It has become conventional among commentators on globalisation, left or right, for or against, to assume that, if the global economy has not yet rendered the nation-state obsolete, there is, at least, an inverse relation between the degree of globalisation and the importance of the territorial state. That assumption encourages the view that transnational organisations should be the primary targets of opposition; and perhaps we can understand Harvey’s argument about the relation between economic and political power as a more sophisticated and nuanced statement of that principle. The implication is that global capital tends toward a global state and that, therefore, the focus of opposition should be correspondingly transnational. To be sure, his account is very far from any mechanical base/superstructure model. It certainly does not assume that political superstructure will follow economic base in some mechanical, if sometimes delayed, reflex. On the contrary, he ascribes a strong independence to the political ‘logic’, which is the source of fundamental contradictions in capitalist imperialism. But the basic principle remains: the reach of political power must match the scope of capital, and capital generates a powerful drive in that direction.

I have tried to offer an alternative view of the relation between the economic and political logics of capitalism. If the reach of political power fails to match the scope of accumulation, it is not because of some independent political or
territorial impulse external to capital, which often acts in opposition to the logic of accumulation. It is certainly true that the costs of political power may weigh heavily on the accumulation of capital. But the point, again, is that the specific division of labour between political and economic power which is the essence of capitalism means that global capital needs the fragmentation of political space. The nation-state is useful to global capital because of the state’s unique capacity to organise the world, in a way that capital itself cannot, to enable its navigation of the global economy. The world is now more than ever a system of territorial states, and economic circuits are now more than ever organised by that system, through the medium of interstate relations. The contradiction here lies not in the autonomy of the political logic from the logic of capital but, rather, in the contradictory needs of capital itself.

Of course, this contradiction has to do with the growing distance between the economic power of capital and the territorial limits of the extra-economic power on which it depends. But this contradiction does not arise from an independent territorial or political impulse which thwarts or opposes the impulses of capital accumulation. What is contradictory is that the global reach of capital makes it (increasingly?) dependent on local concentrations of extra-economic power. This not only generates international instabilities but also – and this is the point that interests me here – makes capital more vulnerable to oppositional struggles on the domestic front.

The diffusion of economic power among many capitals, while the state stands formally apart from them as an ostensibly neutral political power, has always created difficulties for anticapitalist struggles, because it makes the targets of opposition harder to identify. The view that there are no concentrations of power in capitalist societies has always been a benefit to capital and an obstacle to struggles against it; and the currently fashionable view (see, for instance, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri) that globalisation effectively means there is (to use their words) no longer any ‘place of power’ invites the conclusion that no ‘counter-power’ is possible either.\(^\text{19}\) The political message people are likely to read into this, if they do not simply give up in defeat, is that only the most local and particular struggles are possible, against very local and particular oppressions, or that the only effective way of

\(^{19}\) Hardt and Negri themselves explicitly draw this conclusion and then try to construct an alternative (and essentially mystical) form of opposition, which has very little to do with the configuration of power in the real world.
confronting global capital is on some very diffuse transnational plane. In either case, the conclusion is that there is little to be gained from political organisation at the level of the state, and especially not from class-based organisations struggling to transform class power in the state.

My argument invites a different conclusion. Arguments like Hardt and Negri’s, far from enabling oppositional struggles, seem to me deeply disabling, not least because they deprive those struggles of any tangible targets. At any rate, their views on the state and national struggles seem to me completely misconceived. The integration of the global economy has not only made corporations more vulnerable to local, regional and national struggles. It has also made the territorial state in many ways more, not less, important to capital; and this means that organised political struggles at the level of the state are also more, not less, important.

Take recent events in the European Union, for instance. The referenda in France and the Netherlands, which threw the EU into crisis, may have opened up new opportunities to organise those who opposed the constitution from the Left, if not necessarily on clearly anticapitalist grounds then at least to defend a ‘social’ Europe against the ‘Anglo-Saxon’ model of capitalism. But those opportunities will be lost – and may already have been lost – in the absence of organised political forces on the Left prepared to contest for state power in each territorial state, with believable national programmes to deal with the consequences of globalisation. This is certainly not to deny the importance of regional and transnational solidarities. But the future of an integrated Europe, and the role of the European Left in anticapitalist struggles beyond its borders, depend less on protests at G8 summits, however numerous and successfully organised they are, than on how the French sort out the current disarray of their parties on the Left, or whether (as is not impossible) political forces in Germany and perhaps even Britain undergo a re-alignment that produces genuine socialist parties with a substantial popular base.

I honestly do not know whether Harvey would disagree with any of this, and I am very conscious that I may be vastly exaggerating the differences between us. But there is certainly something worth talking about.

20 Gindin 1999.
21 I have made this argument at greater length elsewhere – for example, in Wood 2002 and Wood 2003.
References


Noel Castree

David Harvey’s Symptomatic Silence

Introduction

After three decades of relentless erudition, one might expect David Harvey’s writings to peter out inexiguous fragments and glosses. Yet The New Imperialism possesses the almost athletic rational energy of his best books (like The Limits to Capital). Written with characteristic self-assurance, its five chapters confirm the massive intellectual consistency of a figure who first turned to Marxism with great élan in the early 1970s. Though a conjunctural analysis, the book is grounded in Harvey’s long-standing anatomisation of ‘the molecular processes of capital accumulation in time and space’.

When wedded to a theory of how national states seek to secure their various interests on a world stage, this understanding of capitalism’s inveterate tensions defines the field of possibility and constraint within which contingent decisions have created our current geo-economic and geopolitical realities. Since this field is inescapable – short of capitalism’s dissolution – then, for Harvey, it is also the necessary reference-point for figuring

---

1 I wish to thank Ben Fine, Bob Jessop and Sam Ashman for their comments as this essay took shape.

out how to go forward from here to create a saner, more just future. Quite how clairvoyant Harvey’s prognostications are remains to be seen. But his diagnostic judgements about why our global political economy has taken an ‘imperial (re)turn’ will likely remain of interest even after events have moved on. For it is precisely their grounding in a conception of those necessary processes that undergird non-necessary happenings that will, perhaps, prevent The New Imperialism from dating in a way other books on the same topic undoubtedly will.

As these comments imply, Harvey’s book can be evaluated in at least three ways. Firstly, one might scrutinise the theoretical architecture of the text. Here, one would be interested in such things as the internal coherence of the arguments as well as their capacity to convincingly explain the contemporary global situation. In the second place, one might ask questions about the impressive range and volume of information that Harvey presents in The New Imperialism. Here, one would be interested in empirical presences and absences, as well as in how far the theoretical claims made are informed by (as opposed to dictating) the evidence presented. Finally, one might take a more biographical tack and consider The New Imperialism in relation to Harvey’s previous writings. Here, one would ask questions about the role the book plays in the thought of one of our most distinguished living Marxists. Scaling up from this, one might also speculate what The New Imperialism tells us about that generation of academic Marxists to which Harvey belongs. As they enter the twilight of their careers, the members of this generation are forced to take stock of their achievements as well as their failures in the certain knowledge that they have more days behind them than ahead of them.

Most reviewers of The New Imperialism will interrogate its theoretical and evidential claims, for obvious reasons. The need for a careful assessment of Harvey’s arguments is rendered all the more necessary now that his book is just one of many on the topic announced in its title. Remarkably, the term ‘imperialism’ has gained a new saliency in leftist intellectual and activist circles, where just a few years ago it seemed an out-moded concept unlikely ever to enjoy a revival. Aside from Harvey, Noam Chomsky and Michael Mann are just some of the other left luminaries who have self-consciously and substantively deployed the term in their recent writings. So some attempt to evaluate Harvey’s book with comparative reference to a burgeoning literature on imperialism, as well as in its own right, is the likely tack that most reviewers of the book will take.
This is one reason why, in this essay, I prefer to take the third route identified above. Another is the fact that considerations of Harvey’s œuvre are few and far between. His books are more often reviewed in isolation than situated within an intellectual trajectory that began on the eve of the first widespread postwar economic crisis. This oversight on the part of Harvey’s admirers and detractors is unfortunate (though a recent critical reader and a primer have made some amends). Whatever the critics’ eventual verdict on the book, *The New Imperialism* crowns a canon of commanding weight. The intellectual sweep and grandeur of Harvey’s intellectual edifice knows no equivalent within contemporary Marxism. Few, if any, living Marxists (including the polymathic Fredric Jameson) have made such singular contributions to our understanding of so wide a range of issues. Since *Social Justice and the City*, Harvey’s forays into various topical regions – including urbanism, finance, space-time and culture – have been of such originality as to define the parameters of debate within and beyond the Marxist camp. His are the rewards not just of a very fine mind. He has also had the knack of working on topics that other Marxists have either ignored or abandoned.

As noted above, imperialism is not one of them, given the recent proliferation of left-wing writings on the subject. But, as I will explain in due course, the interest of Harvey’s book lies less in its specific arguments than in the kind of intervention it aspires to be when set in the context of his glittering career as a dissenting academic past his seventieth year. Thus, odd as it may seem, I choose not to assess the substantive content of *The New Imperialism* in any sustained way in the pages that follow. Rather, my aim is to approach the book symptomatically: as a text whose general characteristics (such as its prose style and its intended audience) give us telling insights into those modalities of Marxism – of which Harvey’s is a prime example – that have been crafted in university settings. Specifically, I will argue that *The New Imperialism* is marked by a major caesura that gives it an almost tragic quality. The book’s unwillingness to problematise its author’s institutional location is, in my view, a silence that speaks volumes about the limitations of a Marxism nurtured in institutions of higher learning rather than in relation to any living political movement. These limitations are not so much intellectual as practical.

---

3 See Castree and Gregory (eds.) 2006; Jones 2006.
4 Even if Marxists outside his home discipline of geography were slow to recognise his achievements.
ones: namely, those of a Marxism whose insights, however acute, remain too institutionally-bound to change the world rather than merely understand it.

My argument proceeds as follows. Firstly, I précis *The New Imperialism* and offer some passing observations on its principal theses. Following this, I attempt to situate the book within Harvey’s larger body of writings. My aim here is identify what kind of intervention *The New Imperialism* is when compared to its author’s previous publications. This leads me, in the next section, to make some wider observations about the kind of university-based thinkers who have dominated Anglophone Marxist thought as a whole for at least three decades. Finally, taking *The New Imperialism* as a possibly emblematic case, I suggest that Harvey’s unwillingness to examine his institutional location speaks to the wider failings of a Marxism removed from the world it wishes to alter.

**A not so new imperialism**

*The argument*

*The New Imperialism* is based on a series of lectures delivered at Oxford University in February 2003. Its five chapters reflect the three spoken versions from which they derive. Written in direct, uncluttered prose, they read easily despite the lengthiness of all but one of them. Together, they comprise a 212-page essay whose intended audience is far larger than the academic constituency Harvey has written for throughout most of his career. Like *The Condition of Postmodernity* (by far his best-known and best-selling book), *The New Imperialism* is aimed at a left-leaning public at once angry and anxious about the overseas ventures of Bush Junior and his allies. The book is ostensibly an analysis of America’s geo-economic and geopolitical manoeuvrings post-9/11. It is also, by implication, an analysis of our global political economy in the early twenty-first century. But, in a characteristic Harveyesque move, the book situates this two-sided concern with our contingent present within a theory of the enduring logics that define what is possible and probable in any given conjuncture. In Harvey’s estimation, actualities cannot be comprehended outside an understanding of broad political and economic necessities, even as an understanding of these necessities is insufficient to explain contingent occurrences. Since *The New Imperialism* is a very discursive text, let me try to lay bare this interplay of the essential and the conjunctural.
The book’s argumentative structure is strikingly simple. Following Arrighi, Harvey sees two fundamental logics at work in the world: the logic of territorial acquisition and control (spearheaded by national governments) and the fluid logic of capital accumulation (spearheaded by firms). Intimately linked yet irreducible, Harvey’s analysis pivots on the complementarities and contradictions between the two. Where political decision-makers must reckon with a global space partitioned into sovereign states, economic decision-makers operate in a ‘spaceless’ environment insofar as investment, production and competition are relatively unconstrained by national boundaries. As Harvey puts it,

[w]hat sets imperialism of the capitalist sort apart from other conceptions of empire is that it is the capitalist logic that typically dominates... But this then poses a crucial question: how can territorial logics of power, which tend to be awkwardly fixed in space, respond to the open spatial dynamics of endless capital accumulation?

This abstract question is answered through an analysis of how and why the Bush administration has reversed the US’s historical preference for ‘empire lite’. In Chapter One (‘All About Oil’), Harvey dismisses the stated reasons for the US-led invasion of Iraq (for example, the nuclear threat posed by Saddam Hussein’s government). Disinterring the deeper causes ‘behind an incredible surface froth of misleading rhetoric and disinformation’, he arrives at the following proposition: ‘whoever controls the Middle East controls the global oil spigot and whoever controls the global oil spigot can control the global economy, at least for the near future’. In Harvey’s view, the invasion of Iraq is part of a larger US attempt to exert direct control over oil supplies in the Middle East as a whole. This immediately poses the question of why the American state would wish to exert this kind of territorial control over an economic asset of global significance. Harvey’s answer is that command of the world’s largest known reserves of such a pivotal primary resource is one way in which the US can compensate for its declining economic power vis-à-vis other parts of the world.

---

6 Harvey 2003, p. 33.
7 The signal exception to this preference was, of course, the US’s bloody involvement in Vietnam.
8 Harvey 2003, p. 8.
9 Harvey 2003, p. 19.
Lest this sound like economic reductionism, Harvey acknowledges that the White House’s neoconservatives have used Iraq as a means of securing order and solidarity at home. But, beyond this, Harvey insists that the economic motives for increasing unilateralism in US foreign policy are paramount. Taking the perspective of the *longue durée*, Chapter Two (‘How America’s Power Grew’) traces the US’s rise to both economic and political dominance after 1945. Harvey argues that the power of any hegemon rests upon the three pillars of production, finance and military capability. The US clearly possessed all three in abundance after 1945, in part for the simple reason that it had escaped the economic and military traumas experienced by Britain, France and Germany. Following Arrighi once more, Harvey distinguishes between consensual forms of state hegemony involving ‘collective power’ and more coercive forms involving ‘distributive power’. In Harvey’s estimation, the US is no longer seen to be acting in the interests of capitalist countries at large. For him, its current international isolation (excepting British loyalty) bespeaks a hegemon engaged in ‘a zero-sum game in which competition can improve [its]... position... by taking power away from others...’.

The reason for this shift, Harvey argues, is that the US is no longer dominant in the realm of production and is facing challenges in the realm of finance too. Economic competition from Western Europe and Japan were already posing threats to the US’s productive base three decades ago, since when the East and South-East Asian economies have confirmed its transition into a service economy with only a few remaining islands of manufacturing strength. In this environment, Harvey argues, the US has used its financial power to maintain a waning economic dominance since the early 1970s (the so-called ‘Wall St.-Treasury-IMF complex’). However, the flip-side of financial dominance is financial vulnerability. The US’s record levels of national indebtedness, its huge trade deficit and its exposure to the dire consequences that follow when fictitious capital routed through New York is invested unsuccessfully all make the US’s financial power shaky in Harvey’s view. ‘It is in this context’, he avers,

that we see the Bush administration looking to flex its military muscle as the only clear absolute power it has left. The open talk of empire as a political
option presumably seeks to hide the exaction of tribute from the rest of the world under rhetoric of delivering peace and freedom for all.\(^{12}\)

Yet there is, of course, a contradiction here too. For military ventures like Iraq require just the kind of strong economic underpinning whose incipient absence is precisely the reason, in Harvey’s view, why the US has abandoned the ‘soft power’ policy abroad in the first place.

To rephrase all this in the language of Harvey’s ‘two logics’ framework, he sees the US’s current exercise of territorial power as an attempt to resist the new economic geography created by the expanded reproduction of capital. In this, he argues, there is nothing new. Current US ventures overseas are, in Harvey’s analysis, the predictable actions of a hegemon whose power was based on an economic foundation that is melting into air. In Harvey’s framework, any and all hegemonic states in a capitalist world must eventually deploy whatever powers they can muster to shore up their declining productive and financial position. Chapter Three of *The New Imperialism* (‘Capital Bondage’) spells out the broad logics of territorial control and capital accumulation and in so doing places the earlier discussions of US statecraft in a broader theoretical perspective. Re-iterating arguments first made in his magisterial *The Limits to Capital*, Harvey argues that capital accumulation is a ‘molecular’ process that creates a restless – indeed chronically unstable – landscape of cities and regions. The impulse to ‘annihilate space by time’, which originates within the ‘primary circuit of capital’, creates a geography riven with tensions: ‘tensions between competition and monopoly, between concentration and dispersal, between centralization and decentralization, between fixity and motion . . . ’.\(^{13}\) The map of nations and political borders is overlaid on this dynamic economic landscape. Harvey argues that national states can benefit from and promote the strength of growth regions that lay within their political jurisdiction. But he also insists that they cannot prevent flows of capital seeking new opportunities, many of which will be abroad. The expanded reproduction of capital – expressed as ‘temporal fixes’ (the absorption of surpluses in long term capital projects or social expenditures like education) and ‘spatial fixes’ (the absorption of surpluses in the building of new production and consumption complexes) – ultimately creates rival cities and regions to match those that lie within the borders of leading capitalist states.

\(^{12}\) Harvey 2003, p. 77.

\(^{13}\) Harvey 2003, p. 101.
As Harvey has long argued, following Marx, expanded reproduction simply widens the terrain over which capital’s contradictions are expressed. Citing Robert Brenner’s analysis of post-1945 capitalism,\textsuperscript{14} he identifies a chronic problem of overaccumulation existing since the early 1970s (in which surpluses of labour, fixed capital and money capital have lain idle in the absence of productive uses for them). This, Harvey argues, is the other economic story that lies behind Bush’s Middle-East forays. For it is not just that the US is no longer the economic super-power it once was. More generally, the three great economic blocs – North America, the EU and Asia (East and South-East) – are seeking to maintain economic growth in an adverse climate: one in which someone somewhere must ultimately bear the brunt of any devaluations latent in the capitalist system. Here, Harvey argues, powerful national states have a crucial role to play in perpetuating their economic advantages by manipulating the institutions of global economic governance (the IMF, World Bank, WTO etc.).

Chapter Four (‘Accumulation by Dispossession’) explores the leading edge of this manipulation during the years of the US-led neoliberalism that preceded the Bush presidency. Playing on Marx’s notion of ‘primitive accumulation’, Harvey argues that the leading capitalist countries have for many years sought to stave-off over accumulation crises through internalising that which lies outside the capitalist system. Led by finance capital, the G7 have opened up new pastures for economic growth by forcing developing countries to privatise, commodify and marketise things that previously resisted the logic of capital. This has both ‘created vast fields for the absorption of surplus capital’ as well as ‘provided a means to visit the costs of devaluation . . . upon the weakest and most vulnerable territories . . .’.\textsuperscript{15} Harvey interprets much of the current ‘anticapitalist movement’ as an inchoate set of reactions to accumulation by dispossession in its various concrete manifestations. Insofar as America is actually (and is perceived to be) at the forefront of accumulation by dispossession, then the anticapitalist movement is, inevitably, an ‘anti-America’ movement at some level.

In the final chapter (‘Consent to Coercion’), Harvey speculates about the immediate future for the US and also globally. Should Bush be re-elected and the attempt to dominate Middle-Eastern politics be fully realised, Harvey feels that a dual crisis of international legitimacy and military overexpenditure

\textsuperscript{14} See Brenner 2002.
\textsuperscript{15} Harvey 2003, p. 184.
will reign it back in. The US’s abandonment of a ‘collective’ mode of leadership will, he speculates, lead the other G7 powers (plus China) to withdraw their support (in many cases with the strong endorsement of their electorates). At the same time, the exorbitant costs of a US military presence in Iraq, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan and beyond will worsen the country’s indebtedness to others. Unless the US is willing to undergo its own form of ‘structural adjustment’, Harvey suggests that there may be a ‘withdrawal into regional configurations of capital circulation and accumulation . . . exacerbated by a rising tide of nationalism and racism . . . ’16 – a phenomenon redolent of the run-up to World War II. The only way to avoid this, he believes, is a global New Deal led by a more centre-left US administration willing to tackle the excesses of neoliberalism by

reformulating state power along much more interventionist and redistributionist lines, curbing the speculative powers of finance capital, and decentralizing or democratically controlling the overwhelming power of monopolies and oligopolies . . . 17

The ultimately more progressive aim of overthrowing capitalism worldwide would require a coming together of ongoing class struggles in the domain of expanded capital reproduction with struggles against accumulation by dispossession – a union that Harvey feels is unlikely.

Observations

Though I do not want to evaluate Harvey’s arguments systematically, I do want to make some passing observations en route to my main concern in this essay. If The New Imperialism’s intended audience were principally an academic one – comprising Marxists and other leftists working in the fields of economics, sociology, human geography, political science and international relations – I suspect that audience would find the book wanting. Among the reasons for this I would cite the following. Firstly, the book lacks a proper theory of the state, a lacuna consistent with Harvey’s previous writings as a Marxist. While the molecular logic of capital is explicated convincingly, the territorial logic of the state is given none of the attention it deserves and pales in comparison with the work of a figure like Bob Jessop. Secondly, The New Imperialism rather superficially draws upon, without really developing, ideas derived from a

16 Harvey 2003, p. 207.
17 Harvey 2003, p. 209.
fairly limited range of previous works – Harvey’s own, of course, but also those of Giovanni Arrighi, Hannah Arendt and Samir Amin. Finally, Harvey’s book never really defines what imperialism is, confirming Panitch and Gindin’s observation that ‘[t]he concept of imperialism has . . . been . . . important as much for its emotive and mobilizing qualities as for its analytic ones’. 18 This is evident in Harvey’s formal definition of ‘capitalist imperialism’ 19 as a combination of

‘the politics of state and empire’ (imperialism as a distinctively political project . . .) and ‘the molecular processes of capital accumulation in space and time’ (imperialism as a diffuse political economic process . . .).

Here, the term ‘imperialism’ encompasses virtually any state actions overseas as well as the expanded reproduction of capital. This is surely too imprecise a definition to be serviceable in more than a rhetorical sense. Harvey is here describing as ‘imperialist’ phenomena he has heretofore not so characterised, feeding the suspicion that the term has been chosen for polemical reasons rather than any added analytical value. 20

In sum, I would guess that the eventual verdict on The New Imperialism among Harvey’s peers will be that its arguments are neither remarkable nor contemptible. Should this judgement come to pass, Harvey would no doubt be disappointed. But, as I noted in the previous sub-section, it seems to me that the main audience he is trying reach with his book is a politically literate left-wing public. The evidence for this is not hard to seek, even though Harvey nowhere announces his intended constituency of readers in the pages of The New Imperialism. In the first place, the chapters are not cluttered with references to published literature like most academic writings. Secondly, Harvey’s periodic English is clearly intended to appeal to the intelligent non-specialist, not the expert accustomed to baroque jargon. Thirdly, Harvey resists the temptation to cram his text with erudite allusions to the Marxian theoretical canon he has contributed to so richly throughout his career. 21 Instead, as intimated above, he presents a highly didactic structure that revolves around the dualities of necessity-contingency, depth-surface, state-capital, fixity-fluidity, and

---

18 Panitch and Gindin 2003, p. 2.
20 Though I think the notion of ‘accumulation by dispossession’ is both rhetorically powerful and analytically useful.
21 For instance, Harvey makes little reference to the classical-Marxist debates on imperialism in the book.
The writings of David Harvey

The New Imperialism is David Harvey’s eleventh book as a Marxist. In addition to these texts, Harvey has been a prolific writer of papers and book chapters – many of which have become classics in the once unfashionable discipline that, despite his current berth in an anthropology department, Harvey calls his own (human geography). In all his publications, the commitment to theory has been a leitmotif. ‘By our theories you shall know us’ was the rousing conclusion to his first book, and Harvey has certainly become known to his readers as a theorist first and foremost. From the pathbreaking Social Justice and the City through The Limits to Capital to Spaces of Hope, Harvey has sought to extend the work of the late Marx into topical regions largely unexplored by Marx himself as well as his epigones. This has been more than an exercise in Marxology, of course. Whatever the specificities of late nineteenth-century capitalism, Harvey is one of several classical Marxists

22 These literatures are, of course, those of a century ago and those of the 1960s.
23 His one non-Marxist text, Explanation in Geography, was published before his Damascene conversion in the early 1970s.
24 Harvey severed his formal ties with geography in 2000 when he left Johns Hopkins University. A précis of The New Imperialism appears in The Socialist Register 2004, alongside a set of other contributions by leading leftists of our time on the subject of imperialism (Harvey 2003).
convinced that *Capital*, *Grundrisse* and *Theories of Surplus Value* provide a set of abstractions that – when suitably modified and extended – can help us understand the invariant dynamics that animate capitalism today. Aside from one ostensibly empirical study, *Consciousness and the Urban Experience*, and one more philosophical treatise, *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference*, virtually all of Harvey’s publications comprise a quest to fashion a ‘cognitive map’ or ‘encompassing vision’ that can help us see the political economic logics that underpin seemingly disparate aspects of contemporary life.  

Harvey’s profound belief in the necessity (though not sufficiency) of theory is predicated on a conception of knowledge that is both realist and activist. I use the term realist here in a conventional sense of knowledge that can reflect reality ‘as in a mirror’, however imperfectly. For Harvey, like Marx, such realistic knowledge is hard-won, for the reason that surface appearances in a capitalist world constitutively conceal the underlying processes that give rise to them. But such knowledge is not neutral with regard to the reality it represents, because new representations of the world can alter existing practices and so have a tangible consequence. As Harvey put it in an essay that still stirs the passions three decades on, ‘it is irrelevant to ask whether concepts, categories and relationships are “true” or “false”. We have to ask, rather, what it is that produces them and what they serve to produce’. In short, Marxist theory ‘matters’ for Harvey in the double sense that it can illuminate hidden realities and contribute to social change. The ‘Preface’ to *Consciousness and the Urban Experience* expressed it well enough: ‘the struggle to make Marxian concepts both plain and hegemonic [is] . . . as important as active engagement on the barricades. That is why Marx wrote *Capital*. And that is why I can write these words’.  

Harvey’s enormous faith in the power of theory to make a difference has certainly been vindicated within the academy. From *Social Justice and the City* onwards, his serried publications have been central to a set of paradigm shifts and new research directions within various disciplinary and interdisciplinary communities. Consider his impact on human geography, urban studies and Marxian economics, to take three obvious cases. With *Social Justice and the City*, Harvey almost single-handedly invented ‘Marxist geography’, so instigating the ‘revolution in geographical thought’ that the first of these

---

26 Harvey 1989b, pp. 2, 4.
27 Harvey 1973, p. 298.
28 Harvey 1985a, p. xii.
books so passionately wished for. In these two texts and his subsequent ‘Studies in the History and Theory of Urbanization’, Harvey showed geographers why built environments are ‘active moments’ in the ever unstable reproduction of capital. Likewise, Harvey left a deep impression on urban studies. His remarkable ability to link macro-issues (such as the role cities play in processes of accumulation) and micro-issues (such as the determinants of land rent and residential differentiation within cities) helped pioneer the search for holistic theory among urban analysts whose inquiries had all too often been piecemeal and fragmented. Finally, even if Harvey had published nothing else as a Marxist, *The Limits to Capital* would be acknowledged as among the finest contributions to radical economics since Marx published *Capital*. Though its qualities were slow to be recognised outside human geography, its extension and clarification of Marx’s thinking about finance capital and ‘spatial fixes’ in particular is now regarded as a major theoretical achievement.

All of the above mentioned books were written with academic audiences in mind. They were each intended to alter the way specific scholarly communities analysed a world in which capitalism was even more pervasive than in Marx’s time. But things changed for Harvey in 1989 with the publication of *The Condition of Postmodernity*. Like *The New Imperialism*, this was not written as a purely theoretical text. But nor was it empirically grounded in the way the Paris essays of *Consciousness and the Urban Experience* were. Instead, it was a sweeping, highly readable, conjunctural analysis in which a muscular theoretical framework was leavened with all manner of observations about late 1980s culture and economics. The book’s unexpected success – tens of thousands of copies sold in several languages – was arguably attributable to three things. First, it was highly topical (just as *The New Imperialism* is). Secondly, it was the most comprehensive and diagnostic account of postmodernism to date. Ranging across architecture, literature, consumption, finance and more, it was able to explain – using a compelling theoretical logic – a range of postmodern practices that were, in Harvey’s view, less novel and progressive than they appeared to be. Finally, Harvey’s decision to write the book for no particular disciplinary audience paid unexpected dividends. For not only was it read across the humanities and social sciences. The book also attracted the attentions of an educated non-academic readership.

29 Harvey 1985a, 1985b.
30 The book was reissued under the imprimatur of Verso in 1999 and again in 2006.
31 See Harvey 1989a.
that discovered it in high-street book stores, reading groups, broadsheet review pages and the like. While Harvey could have predicted the former, he probably did not expect the latter. *The Condition* arguably made him the best known living Marxist in the English speaking world, if not further afield – with the probable exception of Eric Hobsbawm and the possible exceptions of Eagleton and Jameson.

I mention all this because it seems to me that, since the early 1990s, all Harvey’s books have been written not only with an avowedly cross-disciplinary audience in mind. In addition, the relative success of *The Condition* outside academic circles has emboldened Harvey to think that his writings might also ‘change ways of thought . . . among the public at large’.32 This said, the three books immediately prior to *The Condition*, whatever Harvey’s aspirations for them, circulated mainly among the former constituency. *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* was, one might suggest, far too difficult and rambling a read for even the most tenacious general reader unaccustomed to the esoteric tonalities of materialist philosophy. Meanwhile, Harvey’s (seemingly odd) decision to publish *Spaces of Hope* and *Spaces of Capital* with a small British university press – Edinburgh – no doubt limited their visibility.33 In this context, *The New Imperialism* can be seen as Harvey’s most self-conscious attempt since *The Condition* to shape thinking within a left-wing public sphere that extends beyond (while including) universities. For reasons spelled out in the previous section, it is an intervention in the present aimed principally not at experts on international relations, global economics and the like. There are other reasons too, and I will touch upon these momentarily. But, to understand the likely success or failure of Harvey’s ‘public pitch’, we need next to consider the current condition of Anglophone Marxist thought and practice.

**Marxisms: academic and otherwise**

As the generation of Marxists to which Harvey belongs reach the autumn of their careers, they may well fear that the ideas they once professed so

---

33 Harvey’s break with Blackwell was mostly due to his dismay at the way his long-time editor – John Davey – was treated by the publisher in the mid-1990s. Davey migrated to Edinburgh University Press where he was charged with establishing a geography list. Harvey would almost certainly not have published with EUP without Davey’s influence.
influentially (in the 1970s and 1980s) will die with them. This generation made Marxist thought a living force in an English-speaking world whose only indigenous tradition in this area – prior to the late 1960s – lay in the historiography of figures such as Edward Thompson.\textsuperscript{34} Aside from Harvey himself, Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson, Bob Jessop, Robert Brenner, Erik Olin Wright, Ben Fine, Stuart Hall, and Alex Callinicos are just some of the better known pioneers of Marxist thinking within and beyond their respective fields. The intellectual efforts of this cohort – which have involved major theoretical extensions and innovations rather than just canonical restatements of existing ideas – made Marxism the leading left-wing paradigm within the Anglophone academy for twenty years. But, from the early 1990s, things changed. The serried ranks of post-prefixed approaches marched their way through the landscape of leftist thought, changing it irrevocably. This was accompanied by, and sometimes fed into, the maturation of perspectives constructed in the name of insurgent actors other than those defined by their class position. In this new environment, Marxism faced a sustained interrogation of its axioms and central theses. Its leading figures – predictably enough – adopted a somewhat defensive stance, becoming preoccupied with writing apologias.\textsuperscript{35} As the old century has given way to a new one, these figures realise all too well that their legacy may last only a further generation at best. Once their acolytes and graduate students reach the end of their careers – ten or twenty years from now – Marxism may have few serious intellectual representatives in the Anglophone world.

This constitutes a remarkable change of fortunes for what has been (and, I think, remains) the most fertile body of Marxist thinking anywhere in the world. The rise of Anglophone Marxism from the early 1970s was coincident with the exhaustion of Western Marxism – as Perry Anderson correctly predicted in his well known survey of the latter.\textsuperscript{36} Forged mostly during the Cold War, Western Marxism was easily the most creative corpus of Marxism during the period of the long postwar boom. But its leading figures wrote little of consequence after the Fordist-Keynesian era ground to a halt in 1973. Meanwhile, the ossified state Marxism of the Communist bloc had had its

\textsuperscript{34} Though the term ‘Anglophone’ refers strictly to North America, the UK and the two Antipodean countries, I use it here to refer to Canada, the US and the UK only. Australia and New Zealand have produced little in the way of agenda-setting Marxist scholarship, unlike the other Anglophone countries.

\textsuperscript{35} The Condition of Postmodernity being a signal example.

\textsuperscript{36} Anderson 1976.
day by the late 1980s, while China moved steadily away from its socialist principles as the century drew to a close. Thus, as the ‘crisis of Marxism’ was being announced in the Anglophone world some fifteen years ago, no other geographical zone seemed likely to fill the vacuum created should that crisis not be successfully weathered. This remains the case today, notwithstanding a few outposts of Marxist theorising outside the US, UK and Canada.

The great irony of this, of course, is twofold. On the one side, the English-speaking world has never had a mass movement receptive to Marxist ideas of the kind that Harvey et al. have expounded with such determination. On the other side, the roll-out of the neoliberal project worldwide after 1973 has, one might venture to suggest, created the conditions where Marxist ideas could enjoy a new-found receptivity if only a critical mass of activists and organisers existed to make these ideas flesh. The so-called ‘anticapitalist’ movement, as Harvey observes in *The New Imperialism*, has created an unexpected opportunity for Marxism to re-establish its relevance as a critical theory. Anglophone Marxism thus finds itself in a paradoxical situation. No longer dominant within the left wing of the academy, it must also confront the long-standing absence of any grassroots constituency among its host populations. Meanwhile, the kind of economic and political analysis that has been its stock in trade seems especially relevant to a world that, outside the West, is redolent of the Victorian capitalist era that Marx anatomised so brilliantly.

In all of the above I have, of course, used the singular designation ‘Marxism’ in a strictly improper sense, mindful of the fact that it is not ‘a fixed object with an essence to be captured if one has the necessary metaphysical skills’. Simplifying, Anglophone Marxism divides into three main camps: classical, analytical and post-Althusserian. Harvey is a distinguished representative of the first, his work marked by ‘a degree of fidelity to the original spirit and letter of Marx that is quite remarkable: ... [his œuvre is] not an epiphany that rewrites the word according to Saul along the road to a New Church, but a judicious rendering and extension of Marx’s unfinished project’. Analytical Marxism, which flourished during the 1980s, was and remains a creative marrying of core Marxist ideas with the exacting logic of analytical philosophy.

---

37 In sharp contrast to the philosophical disquisitions characteristic of Western Marxists from Lukács to Althusser.
38 McCarney 1990, p. viii.
Finally, post-Althusserian Marxism has two main variants: the ‘overdeterminist Marxism’ associated with Stephen Resnick, Richard Wolff and the journal *Rethinking Marxism*, and the ‘critical-realism Marxism’ exemplified by the work of Richard Walker and Andrew Sayer (among many others).\footnote{Regulation theory is, of course, another outgrowth of Althusser’s thinking but was imported into Anglophone Marxism from France rather than being an ‘indigenous’ creation.}

Rather than specify the very real differences between these modalities of Marxist thought, I want to conclude this section by pointing to two things of direct relevance to the argument I am making here. First, all of these Marxisms have generally been expressed in an idiom of forbidding technical difficulty. In the main, the writings of Anglophone Marxists have been as inaccessible as those of the postwar continental Marxists they superseded from the early 1970s. One has to go back a century – to the works of Lenin, Trotsky and Luxemburg – to find a corpus of Marxist writing successfully addressed to a wider audience yet without being demotic. Secondly, another commonality among the three main variants of Anglophone Marxism – one again shared with their Western-Marxist predecessor – is their institutionalisation in the university. Without exception, the leading Anglophone Marxists of the last three decades have been paid academics working within definite disciplinary contexts.

These two things matter because the English-speaking world has a weak tradition of ‘public intellectuals’ when compared to other parts of the globe (such as France and Germany). In addition, few of the left-wing public intellectuals that the US, UK and Canada have produced have been academics. In Britain, a figure such as Bertrand Russell is the exception that proves the rule.\footnote{Today, the academics in the UK with some kind of ‘public profile’ are very few in number, and include Germaine Greer, Tom Paulin, the late Ben Pimlott, Steven Rose, Susan Greenfield, Roger Scruton, Richard Sennett, and Terry Eagleton.} Why mention all this? Above, I noted the long standing lack of a domestic grassroots movement (perhaps incarnated in a political party) receptive to the ideas of Anglophone Marxists. While this absence is certainly not their fault – its explanation lies in the specific political, cultural and economic histories of the English-speaking countries – these Marxists are arguably culpable in the two respects mentioned. They have become accustomed to writing for other academics, as well as for students, and have not been immune to the normalising influences of university life (like the search for academic prestige through publishing ‘learned works’). Marx, recall,
wrote *Capital* for ‘the working man’. Few texts in the Anglophone Marxist canon have been so written. Here, then, we arrive at the tragedy and the lacuna of Anglophone Marxism. However acute the insights of its many brilliant representatives, its inability (or unwillingness?) to analyse the institutions that sustains them helps explain its limited impact on the thought and practice of the English-speaking world. As David Harvey’s career shows so well, the last three decades have produced some extraordinarily penetrating Marxian analyses of late-capitalist societies. But these analyses too often remain sullen witnesses to their wider societal irrelevance, circulating among only a small and marginalised far-left intelligentsia.

**A silence that signifies**

This summary verdict on Anglophone Marxism having been given, let me conclude by a circling back to *The New Imperialism* and the ways in which it is symptomatic of absences not only in Harvey’s self-understanding but also that of the generation of Marxists of which he is part. I want to make it clear that the criticisms I level at Harvey are not therefore peculiar to him. I should also stress that these criticisms in no way detract from the formidable debt of gratitude that myself and others of my generation owe to a truly inspirational theorist.  

David Harvey has always worked in a university environment. He began his career at Bristol University in the 1960s, became a professor at Johns Hopkins University in the early 1970s, took the Halford Mackinder Chair of Geography at Oxford University in 1987, and then moved back to Hopkins in the 1990s before taking up his current (and probably last) post at City University of New York in 2000. Academics are, of course, principally producers of new knowledge – philosophical, theoretical and empirical. But where they were once, perhaps, special in this regard, today they are just one of many knowledge producers in late-capitalist societies. Broadcasters, computer designers, lawyers, management consultants, policy experts and journalists...
are just some of the many professionals who nowadays create and distribute knowledge rather than, say, material goods. Most of these professionals – like most academics – speak and write in a lingua franca largely unintelligible to ordinary people. A few of them, though, are ‘organic intellectuals’ in Gramsci’s expansive but precise sense of the term: that is, people whose ideas aim to ‘organize interests, gain more power, get more control’. In light of my earlier discussion, it seems to me that Harvey is one of a generation of Marxist scholars who are organic intellectuals in a relatively weak sense: lacking a determinate domestic audience for their thinking outside the academy, they have hoped to at least inform the debate within an increasingly transnational sphere of opinion and among a literate left-wing public. Their intellectual profile is thus, in aspiration at least, more public than organic.

This, then, raises the question of how far Marxists like Harvey can inform such debate within civil society. To answer this question one needs a fairly precise sense of the relative importance of different communications media: after all, to be an opinion-shaper, one needs to be able to utilise powerful means of disseminating new knowledge and ideas. In this regard, Harvey is not as well positioned as he might be. To be an effective ‘public intellectual’ today – whatever one’s political beliefs – one needs exposure in newspapers and magazines, as well as on television. This fact perhaps explains why the most prominent left-wing voices of our age are journalists, such as George Monbiot and John Pilger, or documentary makers such as Michael Moore. Journalists use articles, columns and broadcasts to reach wide audiences, often building up a following in the process. Michael Moore has done the same through his docu-films. This is not to say that book publishing no longer matters. On the contrary, the appetite for book reading in Western societies (fictional and non-) remains undiminished. Noreena Hertz and Naomi Klein are two radicals whose books have sold to a very large number of people disenchanted with neoliberalism. The success of their polemics shows that thought fundamentally critical of the current order does not lack a ready audience. But, unlike Harvey, not only are these two best-selling authors not

---

45 Intriguingly, Harvey’s first book as a Marxist was dedicated to ‘all good committed journalists everywhere’ (Harvey 1973, p. 19). In the early 1990s, Harvey in fact tried his hand in a journalistic medium: radio. He made a series of programmes on modern cities for BBC Radio 4.
46 Monbiot and Pilger have also enjoyed success as book writers, using their profiles as journalists to gain an audience for their critiques.
Marxists; they also have the knack of writing for general audiences. Of course, the price of this is their books lack analytical rigour and depth. But if there is a lesson here for Harvey it is surely this: to make the Marxist critique of capitalism ‘common-sense’ once more, the tactical use of mass media is required. *The New Imperialism* will no doubt sell quite well and be read by many members of the wider public. Though it will no doubt suffer from the fact that it is just one of many books on the topic written by a politically varied pool of authors – including the already mentioned Mann and Chomsky, but also Niall Ferguson. Anderson 1983, p. 11.

These exercises in self-explanation typically appear in introductions to his many books. Of course, the price of this is their books lack analytical rigour and depth. But if there is a lesson here for Harvey it is surely this: to make the Marxist critique of capitalism ‘common-sense’ once more, the tactical use of mass media is required. *The New Imperialism* will no doubt sell quite well and be read by many members of the wider public. Though it will no doubt suffer from the fact that it is just one of many books on the topic written by a politically varied pool of authors – including the already mentioned Mann and Chomsky, but also Niall Ferguson. Anderson 1983, p. 11.

These exercises in self-explanation typically appear in introductions to his many books.

---

47 Though it will no doubt suffer from the fact that it is just one of many books on the topic written by a politically varied pool of authors – including the already mentioned Mann and Chomsky, but also Niall Ferguson.

48 Anderson 1983, p. 11.

49 These exercises in self-explanation typically appear in introductions to his many books.
create the latter, he has long been in a position to choose how and where he published – albeit not under conditions of his own choosing. In the modern world, the power of knowledge-producers is far from equal. Though they have ready-made student audience, academics in the Anglophone world have to work very hard to get their voices heard outside the precincts of the university – unless, of course, their research is ‘policy relevant’ or constitutes ‘serious entertainment’ (as in the case of Simon Schama’s and Niall Ferguson’s books). The kind of theoretical insights that Harvey has to offer cannot speak for themselves. They must be spoken for, as it were, using media and idioms of expression appropriate to the broader constituency he wishes to influence with *The New Imperialism*. Having spent his whole life immersed in the academy, Harvey arguably lacks the contacts, the skills and the profile to reach more than a limited non-academic audience.\(^{50}\) This, I suggest, is typical of our finest Marxist thinkers. The generation of Anglophone Marxists to which Harvey belongs may well have spent too much energy persuading their professional peers that Marxism matters, and too little persuading a wider public that Marxism is not some outdated dogma synonymous with the Communism of old.

**Conclusion**

*The New Imperialism* confirms David Harvey’s aspiration to make Marxism matter beyond the Anglophone academy, so continuing a practice he initiated with *The Condition of Postmodernity*. By placing the book within the context of Harvey’s distinguished academic career, and the context of Anglophone Marxism, I have deliberately refrained from interrogating its arguments in detail. Instead, I have treated the book as symptomatic of more general aspects of Harvey’s Marxism and that of his academic peer group. At the risk of reading too much into the general characteristics of *The New Imperialism*, I have suggested that it may reflect its author’s anxieties about his legacy. While Harvey’s place among the Left’s academic glitterati was secured some time ago, the wider influence of his thinking is uncertain. More positively, the conjunction of expanded capital reproduction and accumulation by

---

\(^{50}\) As noted above, Harvey did briefly broadcast on public radio in the early 1990s, on BBC Radio 4 (in a set of programmes about Western cities). However, to my knowledge, he has undertaken no further activity of this kind.
dispossession that Harvey reports in his book make this a potential turning point for the fortunes of Marxist thought within civil society worldwide. In this light, *The New Imperialism* might be seen as a well intentioned attempt to reach wider audiences in countries that have lacked a Marxist tradition outside universities. But I have suggested that Harvey still has some way to go if he is to function effectively as a public intellectual. Few academics in the Anglophone world have a significant public profile, and virtually none of them are Marxists. If Harvey’s generation of Marxists are ultimately unable to find a receptive non-academic audience for their ideas – beyond a few thousand activists and concerned citizens – then it will be left to their students and collaborators to work on two fronts simultaneously. These successors will not only have to keep the Marxist flame burning in an Anglophone academy whose left wing will be thoroughly dominated by non-Marxist thought. They will also somehow have to reach out beyond the university as Harvey has tried to do. This will be a tall order indeed. But failure is unthinkable for anyone who believes, as I do, that Marxist ideas are indispensable if we are to interpret the world aright and so change it for the better.

**References**


Bob Sutcliffe

**Imperialism Old and New: A Comment on David Harvey’s *The New Imperialism* and Ellen Meiksins Wood’s *Empire of Capital***

*From drought to flood*

Only a few years after Prabhat Patnaik memorably complained about the disappearance of imperialism from the writing of the Left, it has suddenly become the word on everybody’s lists. The website which claims to be the world’s largest (anti-union) bookstore, in response to a recent search in book titles for ‘imperialism’, produced 23,519 items (starting, I was surprised to find, with a book by one V.I. Lenin), 2 items under video games and even 6 under ‘Home and Garden’; ‘hegemony’ came up with 23,757 items, headed by Noam Chomsky; ‘empire’ produced 78,303 books, headed by Niall Ferguson; while globalisation, the great buzz word of the 1990s, produced only 18,120 books, headed by Jagdish Bhagwati. Add to that an uncountable number of articles and you can see the complexity of providing a guide to contemporary thought about imperialism and related concepts.

---

1 I am grateful to Andrew Glyn and Sam Ashman for comments on a draft of this article.
2 Patnaik 1990.
This flood has been produced by a political and ideological equivalent of the perfect storm: many forces coincide at one time and place to produce maximum possible impact. One of these components is the fact that imperialism is no longer always considered a crime committed by one’s enemies. Some authors have begun to confess to and even to celebrate imperialism, so now the book search includes works in favour of imperialism as well as works against. Second, as a result, it has become a term which no longer brands its users as Marxist. Third, a number of writers, some Marxists among them, are provocatively propounding the idea that imperialism is over and that we have arrived somewhere else. Hardt and Negri’s *Empire*, the best-selling Marxist book of modern times, argues this. Fourth, partly in reaction to this, many have re-asserted that the monster is not only alive but is threatening the world with new dangers. And, among the latter category, a number are trying to see what is new about the current state of the world and to explore how historical-materialist and related theories can help to analyse it and ultimately to combat it. This article is a comment on two such recent attempts, by David Harvey\(^3\) and Ellen Meiksins Wood.\(^4\)

**Empire and capital**

The distinctive feature of the Marxist or historical-materialist method of analysing imperialism consists in a special kind of dual vision which tries to integrate coherently two separate aspects of the world. One consists of the hierarchies, conflicts and alliances – political, military and economic – between countries; the other concerns the working of the productive system and the hierarchy of classes which it generates. The first is about dominance and exploitation of some countries by others; the second is about the stability of the productive system and the dominance and exploitation of some classes over others.

Theories of imperialism could be categorised in relation to how these two layers are treated. Conventional thinking tends to look only at one level at a time. There is long tradition of viewing international relations, with their alliances and conflicts, as a story about national interests, quite independently of the production system and socio-economic relations. This perspective leads naturally to the search for parallels between international relations in all

---

\(^3\) Harvey 2003.
\(^4\) Wood 2003.
historical epochs and, in particular, to the comparison of empires one with another over millennia. Capitalism, on this perspective, has little to do with empire. In a similar way, conventional economics sees a harmonious system of international economic relations based on mutually beneficial trading opportunities, just as it sees the harmonious involvement of capital and labour in the production process. And conventional development economics sees economic success or failure as almost entirely a result of whether a government pursues the correct economic policies (which – no prizes for guessing – are those which give freest play to the harmonious forces of the market). No imperialism here. Those who practise political economy, and Marxists in particular, try to break out of these disciplinary boundaries to say something about both of the superimposed layers, to recognise the elements of autonomy in each one as well as the links, complementary and contradictory, between the two.

Nonetheless, there are instances of Marxists arguing that one of the superimposed layers of the complex map has become assimilated to the other. More than once it has been argued that the world has divided into bourgeois and proletarian nations so that class and nation are no longer distinct. Some versions of the still influential theory of dependency come close to this extreme, seeing the division of the world between developed and underdeveloped, imperialist and subjugated countries as more essential than the division between capitalist and working classes. Another, opposite, kind of vision sees the hierarchy of nations as having been reduced to the social relations of production. ‘Post-imperialist’ theorists have argued that the capitalist world has effectively fused into a single socio-economic unit ruled by a self-conscious global bourgeoisie and individual states have lost their importance. A newer version of this idea dominates the argument of Hardt and Negri’s *Empire*, which also contends that the importance of different states has all but disappeared, but that the most coherent class is not, as the post-imperialists had it, the world ruling class but a world ruled class (the ‘multitude’). Between these two reductionisms lie a large number of different interpretations of the meaning of the combined relations of country and class. The most interesting contributions of these do not reduce reality to one or the other layer, nor attempt simply to allocate shares of world exploitation (between class and country) but rather try to see how the two (or more) layers are intertwined, mutually causative and sometimes contradictory.
Harvey and Meiksins Wood: a new imperialism?

Marxists should welcome these two new books by David Harvey and Ellen Meiksins Wood. They both make a serious contribution to the renewal of theoretical debate about imperialism. Both of their books are short and readable (Harvey’s more vivid in style, having once been a series of lectures, Wood’s more rigorous). And both are serious attempts to make sense of the two superimposed layers of nation and class, of international politics and economy. They are ambitious books but neither of them lays claim to having any last word. Towards the end of his book Harvey admits that ‘whether of not this is an adequate conceptualization of matters remains to be evaluated’; and Wood argues that there is as yet no theory of imperialism in an epoch of ‘universal capitalism’:

we have no theory of imperialism which adequately comprehends a world that consists not of imperialist masters and colonial subjects but of an international system in which both imperial and subordinate powers are more or less sovereign.

Their contributions to the search for a systematic theory and an adequate conceptualisation have a surprising amount in common. But they make a number of points which are different from each other, some of them mutually contradictory. And there are a number of important things which neither of them say.

Neither of these two authors questions for a moment that imperialism still exists nor that it is intimately connected to capitalism. But they do both tackle the same question as Hardt and Negri: what is new in the world of the last few decades, and, in particular, is globalisation a new form of capitalism entailing a new form of imperialism to support it? Answering that question leads them to a common central concern: what is the role and the future of US dominance in the world? They seem to agree that globalisation betokens something new but, in Harvey’s words, ‘the new imperialism appears as nothing more that the revisiting of the old, though in a different place and time’. Wood, too, stresses more the elements of continuity than those of rupture between the old and the new imperialism; in fact, a good part of her

---

5 Harvey 2003, p. 182.
6 Wood 2003, p. 152.
7 Harvey 2003, p. 182.
argument is to dispute in crucial respects, in particular over the role of the state, the argument of many (such as Hardt and Negri) that everything has been turned upside down and that we are in a new world without maps or precedents.

They are also both convinced of three things: that the world is qualitatively different from that described by Lenin in the period of the classical-Marxist writings about imperialism – one that was characterised by fratricidal competition for markets, power and territory by an elite of rich, industrialised, heavily armed and relatively equal states; nor do they regard it as very similar to the world described by theorists of dependency, in which the main emphasis is put on the progressive polarisation of wealth and power between a rich minority of imperialist countries and a poor majority of dependent ones; and they are particularly convinced that it is nothing like the world according to Hardt and Negri, in which imperialism has been replaced by a global capitalist system where national states have lost most of their power and influence.

The history of imperialism

The superimposition of the two layers, international hierarchy and capitalist economy, are at the heart of the method of both these writers. The first half of Wood’s book is about precapitalist imperialism in which dominant nations and groups employed extra-economic power to obtain booty or benefits in exchange, aided by force, often of the state. Even during the phase in which Holland was the leading power, imperialism was in this sense basically non-capitalist. Then, from the seventeenth century onwards, imperialism became increasingly associated with capitalist production. Profit could now be obtained through the circuit of capitalism operating in competitive conditions (in other words, the market). And, yet, the establishment of those conditions, the creation of capitalist markets, especially the labour market, under conditions favourable to the increasingly dominant capitalist class, still required extra-economic means including state military power. Thus, even though more and more of the surplus comes from capitalist exploitation, there is no diminution in the state power required to support it. So it was at first in settler colonies in Ireland, then in North America, until the main colonies there matured enough economically to become their own capitalist imperialist state. Meanwhile, in India and other parts of the British Empire, the precapitalist aspects continued to dominate. As the world has become more capitalist, the
economic aspects of exploitation have continued to increase but the role of the state has never diminished. If anything, it has increased though its functions have changed and the interrelationship of states required to maintain capitalism and US domination within it has become more complex: ‘the more purely economic empire has become the more the nation state has proliferated’.8

The dominance of the USA is central to her argument. Capital’s empire depends both on the complex system of states and on their general subservience to one, which maintains its position due to overwhelming military force. By possessing an amount of force which it is unimaginable that it will ever use, the USA dissuades any other nation from challenging its dominance. But the cost of such dissuasion is also increasingly high, economically and politically, for the USA. Hence the system has become self-contradictory, even self-defeating.

Harvey’s *The New Imperialism* also approaches the question historically. He does not go as far back as Wood, since he does not attach the same importance as she does to the distinction between precapitalist and capitalist imperialism. He dates the beginning of capitalist imperialism, not like Wood from the expansion of British settler capitalism in Ireland and then North America, but, following Hannah Arendt, from the time when the bourgeoisie internationally began to take political power, and that he dates from the revolutions of 1848. Both authors trace the sequence of national hegemonies which have characterised the history of imperialism. From Wood’s perspective, only British and US hegemony have been instances of capitalist imperialism; Spanish, Venetian and Dutch hegemonies were essentially precapitalist. Harvey is more inclined to follow the work of Arrighi and others who have traced patterns common to all these hegemonies, even though they appeared at different stages of maturity and extension of capitalism. There are the germs of an interesting historical debate here, but it hardly leads to a major difference between the main messages of these authors. Wood is more concerned about where the bourgeoisie ruled (especially in Britain and the USA, which therefore spawned the purest capitalist imperialism) while Harvey is more concerned with when the bourgeoisie ruled. But both of them are in no doubt that capitalist imperialism is a real and special phenomenon. And both of them are, perhaps above all, interested in the rise of US hegemony, its causes and consequences.

---

8 Wood 2003, p. 154.
The policies of major capitalist powers are partly dominated by the attempt to expand the productive régime of capital as much as possible. But imperialist actions are not all designed to do this; often, they will have precisely the opposite effect at least in the short term and in particular places. This is because a worldwide system, Harvey argues (taking the terms from Giovanni Arrighi), has two logics: the capitalist logic (the actions necessary to support capitalist exploitation and the market) and the territorial logic (those actions necessary to support the hierarchy of nation-states). These are relatively new terms, but the ideas are quite old. They have been proposed by a number of historians of imperialism to explain why the actions of imperialist powers in the nineteenth century, for example, were apparently so perverse in relation to any possible economic gain. Harvey’s distinction between the capitalist logic and the territorial logic parallels Wood’s distinction between the increasing role of capitalist imperatives throughout the world and the maintenance in the importance of the state as a coercive institution. She, too, argues that the USA, like the British when they conquered India, ‘may be finding that empire creates its own territorial imperative’. In both cases, these are ways of describing the combined picture produced by superimposing the international and economic systems which, I argued above, is the essence of Marxist theories of imperialism.

Wood vs. Harvey

Both writers agree (who doesn’t?) that the end of World War II was a decisive point of inflection in the history of imperialism. The USA emerged as the great superpower, the germs of the Cold War existed and decolonisation of Africa and Asia was about to begin. While both writers use the phrase ‘new imperialism’ hesitantly, since they both see many elements of continuity with old imperialism, nonetheless, insofar as they dare to use the term, this postwar period is for Wood, though not for Harvey, the beginning of the new imperialism. The salient aspects of it are that it represents the beginning of a period of fifty years of the continuous extension of capitalist social relations around the globe. She is quite rightly dismissive of exaggerated claims that globalisation is the building of a complete, integrated, competitive, world-capitalist market. Nonetheless, a process has taken place over these fifty years which has resulted in capitalism now having the greatest global reach of its

history. For the first time, there are ‘economic imperatives comprehensive and powerful enough to be reliable instruments of imperial domination’. But the globalisation of the capitalist economy requires a parallel globalisation of state and military power to protect it and, in particular, a greater amount of US hegemonic military force. Hence the continuous growth of US military power and imperialist activities over this period, culminating in the Bush administration, the power of the neoconservatives and the prospect of endless war. She tends to accept too much, however, the idea that what is actually happening is exactly what leading neoconservatives (especially Richard Perle) have argued should happen; it is surely more haphazard and pragmatic than that.

For Harvey, the post-World-War-II moment is also an inflection point in the history of imperialism. He calls it the beginning of the second phase of bourgeois rule. The US is dominant and confident. It spreads both economic growth and its own version of freedom (particularly anticolonialism) on a world scale. Its imperial nature is hidden behind a democratic façade. But, for a time, it creates real consent and a growing capitalist economy on an international scale. It is only around 1970 that the new imperialism begins. This is associated with the outbreak of a major world crisis of overaccumulation around that time, something to which Wood attaches no special importance. This crisis has become chronic and continues to this day. It is associated with greater economic competition between the main capitalist powers, neoliberal economic policies, a decline in the welfare activities of states and a decisive shift in the nature of capital accumulation from accumulation out of produced and realised surplus-value to ‘accumulation by dispossession’, the original and useful name he gives to the series of processes which Marx called primitive or primary accumulation, and Rosa Luxemburg called the absorption of non-capitalist activities and regions into capitalism. Accumulation by dispossession includes the forcible opening up of markets, the forced sale of publicly owned capital (privatisation), the separation of workers from non-market rights – for instance, from the land which they own or control or from their welfare rights (the right to work, pensions, health care, education and so on). I would add the commodification of numerous activities and exchanges which people participate in outside of capitalist relations, a recent example being swapping music files and many other activities on the internet.

Wood 2003, p. 117.
The double dialectic of the capitalist and territorial logics and the inside and outside forms of capitalist accumulation (accumulation of surplus-value and accumulation by dispossession) become a centrepiece of Harvey’s analysis. ‘Accumulation by dispossession’, he argues has been the major form through which capitalism in a chronic crisis of overaccumulation has sought to ‘fix’ its plight. And a big part of this fix has involved the geographical spread of capitalism. In other words the new imperialism is particularly characterised by accumulation by dispossession and, since much of it involves attacks on existing rights of states or workers, tends increasingly to favour coercive over consensual policies.

Is this a convincing account of the last thirty years of world history? In fairness to Harvey, it should be noted that he does not claim it to be a definitive conceptualisation and he makes appropriate caveats that not everything will fit into this pattern and that some things are fortuitous and unpredictable. Nonetheless, he does try to fit the most salient things into this format. It certainly has quite a lot going for it. Nearly everyone, especially on the Left, agrees that capitalism entered a major crisis around 1970 and others have analysed this in terms of general overaccumulation, which is, after all, what Marx regarded as ‘the essential phenomenon in crises’. Harvey is not the first to emphasise the role of accumulation by dispossession, though he has given it a new name and has drawn attention to the profoundly important ideas on this subject of Rosa Luxemburg, largely neglected on the Left, partly because of a fault in the reasoning which led her nevertheless to the correct emphasis on the continuing importance at all stages of capitalism of preying on the non-capitalist sector of the world (not, as she tended to think a fixed quantity but something which human creativity and political change are constantly renewing). For these reasons, Harvey’s hypothesis is an important one.

Chronic crisis?

For nearly forty years, economic studies have concluded that there was a major fall in the overall profit rate starting in the late 1960s, a strong indication of a crisis of overaccumulation.\footnote{Armstrong, Glyn and Harrison 1991.} The rate of growth of production (world GDP) also fell sharply around 1973 and has never returned to its previous level. World GDP, as estimated by Angus Maddison rose at an annual average
rate of 4.9 per cent (2.9 per cent per head) between 1950 and 1973 and then by an average of 3.2 per cent (1.4 per cent per head) between 1973 and 2002. It is also true that during the post-1973 period there have been a number of spectacular financial collapses such as those in Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, Russia, South-East and East Asia. Harvey sees these as evidence of the continuation of the chronic crisis. But his story of these years seems to me too contrived so that everything fits together too nicely with the hypothesis of a chronic crisis for which capital is seeking temporary fixes. In the analysis of crises (one of the most overused words, surely, in the political and economic analyst’s lexicon) it is nearly always a matter of fine judgement whether a particular situation represents crisis or not. In the social and the physical world, equilibrium is never stable for long. Everything is subject to simultaneous contradictory forces. Economies are, in some ways, like aeroplanes: you could see them as always about to fall to earth unless they receive the necessary fix of fuel and engine thrust; or you could see them as proceeding normally because lift is balancing gravity.

For over three decades, almost everyone on the Left has agreed with Harvey that capitalism entered a crisis around 1970, the details of which have been almost endlessly debated, but there has hardly been any discussion about whether it ever emerged from the crisis; in much writing, there seems to be an unspoken assumption that it is still here. To parallel Patnaik’s question ‘Whatever happened to imperialism?’ we should also ask ‘Whatever happened to the crisis?’. Harvey answers that it is still with us and that the history of the world economy, and to some extent politics, during the last three decades consists of a continuous series of ‘spatio-temporal fixes’ designed to absorb excess capital and so stop the falling rate of profit from leading to total depression. But it is hard to assess this hypothesis without ever being told what would constitute the end of a crisis. Marx, after all, stressed that capitalism was a system walking forever on a knife-edge, but only on occasions falling into crisis. As he vividly said, as soon as there is a market ‘the crisis is there’, meaning not that crisis necessarily existed but that it was always immanent as a possibility.

The events of the last thirty-five years of world capitalism – the opening of markets, globalisation, neoliberalism, privatisation, the transition from

---

12 Maddison 2003.
13 Patnaik 1990.
Communism and state activity and so on – can all be seen as measures to prevent a latent crisis exploding. But perhaps the same facts could also be evidence that capitalism, by means of overcoming one crisis, has entered another period of successful accumulation which may in future be subject in its turn to a new kind of crisis.

The most serious indication of the weakness of Harvey’s chronic crisis theory is his brief reference to China’s phenomenal economic growth of the last twenty-five years. He always mentions it as a location where surplus capital can be absorbed and so the worst consequences of the chronic crisis can be held off a little longer. This seems to me a perverse misinterpretation of what is happening in China and therefore in the world. Instead of being a sink for the absorption of excess capital from elsewhere, China is a new extraordinarily dynamic pole of capitalist accumulation and economic development, under the direction of a strong, rich, dynamic and self-conscious bourgeoisie which is as progressive, in the sense in which Marx often used this term, as the British or US capitalist class in their day. This might mean that the crisis of the 1970s is over and a new period of capitalist expansion is underway, but one which will be centred in Asia and not Europe or the USA. But while the crisis which broke out around 1970 should probably be declared to be over, the problems of US hegemony, so closely associated with that crisis, are by no means over. In fact, there is good reason to suppose that the new China-centred period of capitalist expansion is sharpening the problems for US hegemony.

I certainly do not believe that this alternative interpretation to Harvey’s is definitive. In order to judge alternative interpretations they should be assessed against the background of a large amount of systematic empirical material. While Harvey and Wood both quote empirical studies in support of their analyses, they are themselves empirically timid almost to the point of phobia. A more serious look at the concrete would both support and weaken aspects of their analyses, especially their assessments of the relative strengths of the great powers. In particular, it would surely modify their view of US power which, despite their caveats, both in my view continue to exaggerate.

Borrowed hegemony

The continuing hegemony of the USA is a central element in both Wood’s and Harvey’s definition of the new imperialism. Both of them see it as a
challenged and contradictory hegemony. But a failure to specify or assign enough weight to these challenges and contradictions is associated with their disdain for systematic empirical analysis. It affects their assessment of relative US military power, the relative economic challenges posed by China and Europe and the rapid growth of the USA’s dependence on its potential rivals. They both rightly say that the USA’s efforts to defend an imperilled dominance lead it towards actions which are risky for itself and for the world as a whole. Indeed, its present situation is riven with contradictions. As it uses hard-line methods against one enemy, it makes new ones. The democratic freedoms which it claims to support are not advanced and are even endangered in the USA itself. And the economic cost of the new imperialism forces the USA increasingly into debt and thereby threatens economically the dominance which it tries to maintain politically. The project is self-contradictory, according to Wood; the capitalist and territorial logics are deeply inconsistent, according to Harvey.

All this is true, but in context it still leaves a feeling that the USA is much more powerful than it really is. First, they exaggerate the military power. Harvey says that in military might ‘the US still remains all powerful’\(^{14}\) and Wood claims that US military spending is over 40 per cent of that of the world as a whole. Well, it partly depends on how you measure it. If you compare numbers using exchange rates (the conventional manner, used by most of the world and, for some reason, much beloved by the Left) then it certainly appears that way. But, if you compare using purchasing power parities (PPP, a method of comparison which provides a much more realistic measure of material equivalence, and which can now be done as a result of much economic research, but which most of the Left spurns) then the result is somewhat different. According to this way of measuring, the USA in 2002 spent just under one third of the world total, or a little more than twice the amount spent by China.\(^{15}\) Of course, this is considerably higher than the USA’s share of world production (21 per cent). But, in any case, a great deal of the USA’s spending is on atomic and high-tech equipment which may determine the country’s ability to dissuade challengers for hegemony but does not contribute much to its ability to conduct real wars. In the first eighteen months of its occupation of Iraq, the US armed forces have not brought order or safety, got

\(^{14}\) Harvey 2003, p. 25.
\(^{15}\) SIPRI 2004.
public services back to their prewar levels or stopped constant sabotage of oil facilities.

The use of PPP rather than exchange-rate-based estimates makes an even more startling difference to the perception of the relative economic power of countries. Everyone knows that the USA is the ‘largest economy in the world’, meaning it has the largest national product. All statistics support that. But, relatively, how large is it? According to exchange-rate comparisons, it is almost eight times as large as that of China which is country number 7. According to PPP comparisons, it is only 1.7 times as large as China, which is country number 2. More than that, if you project the growth rates of the last twenty years, you arrive at the following result: in 2011 (only five years from now) China’s GDP would overtake both that of the USA and the EU (25). Those three entities would have similar totals, each about 4 times as large as that of Japan. Projecting another ten years, China’s GDP would be about twice that of the USA, a little more than twice that of the EU and nearly 7 times that of Japan. Already today China produces 26 per cent of the world’s steel (Europe’s share is under 20 per cent and the USA’s under 10), is second only to the USA as an oil importer and is increasingly dominating the commodity markets.

Previous hegemonic countries in the world have been creditor countries. Their creditor status has given them leverage. This is true even if, like Wood, you argue that before the USA there has really only been one capitalist hegemon (i.e. Britain). US hegemony after 1950 was strongly associated with its creditor status. The world owed it money, profits and tribute in other forms. All that ended as US military expenditure rose sharply under Reagan, in order to price the USSR out of the competition. The USA became a debtor nation in 1984, a situation which has been deepening ever since. At the last count (end of 2003) the USA’s net international debts were approaching US $3 trillion (or more than one quarter of US annual production). The debt figure has been doubling every 3–4 years, and now the doddering hegemon has to borrow annually a sum equal to about 10 per cent of its national income. Part of that used to be covered by foreign direct investment in the USA but now the USA is in deficit on that score too. Continued hegemony depends on this rapidly rising debt. In other words, US consumption and investment are increasingly financed by other countries; the USA spends more than it produces while the rest of the world in aggregate does the opposite. Who is lending to the USA? Largely it is Europe, Japan, other East-Asian countries and, increasingly, China. Other factors pointing in the same direction are
mentioned by Giovanni Arrighi in an important article called ‘Hegemony Unravelling’, which has been recently published in New Left Review.\textsuperscript{16} While he accepts that China is the only feasible challenger to US hegemony he still implicitly seems to accept the conventional underestimations of China’s military and economic power.

It is not only in the financial sense that the USA is running down its assets. The more aggressive, more unilateral foreign policy practised by the Bush administration, especially since the attack on the World Trade Center, seems to have converted widespread sympathy for the USA into its opposite. Anti-American feeling has seldom been so strong. In Harvey’s terms, the hegemony of consent has been replaced by the hegemony of coercion and, as a result, friends and co-operators have been lost. Arrighi uses the phrase ‘domination without hegemony’ to characterise this co-existence of continued physical power with diminished moral influence.

Other indicators suggest a possible decline also in the hitherto apparently invincible cultural sway of the USA. There is growing evidence of a decline in or loss of US supremacy in scientific research, publications and patents.\textsuperscript{17} And the security measures introduced in the wake of the destruction of the World Trade Center has sharply reduced the number of graduate students admitted to US universities, not only from ‘suspect’ countries. Other examples could be added.

Although the USA retains enormous relative power, it is increasingly borrowed power. The lenders will not be willing to bankroll this borrowed hegemony for ever. If the new imperialism is the age of US hegemony, the arrival of ‘post-new imperialism’ may be closer than either of these books suggest. Both of them say some of these things, but not, in my view with nearly enough emphasis. On this, Arrighi’s ‘Hegemony Unravelling’ is a more rigorous, forceful and updated analysis of the self-destructive aspects of US policy in response to its declining hegemony.

\textbf{Harvey and Wood vs. Hardt and Negri?}

The authors most liberally quoted by Harvey are Hannah Arendt, Rosa Luxemburg and Giovanni Arrighi; and those most referred to by Wood are a huge array of historians of capitalism and imperialism and (more implicitly)\textsuperscript{16} Arrighi 2005a and 2005b.
\textsuperscript{17} Broad 2004.
Marx. Both are thus a continuation of old and new Marxist debates. But they
are also both implicitly polemical responses to Hardt and Negri’s *Empire*. Har
Harvey and Wood both insist that capitalist imperialism remains a reality
and that the USA remains the dominant power. For Harvey, imperialism in
the last thirty years reflects a desperate search for surplus-value in prolonged
crisis of overaccumulation, while Wood insists that, as capitalism has become
more global than it has ever been, the state as a protector and manager of
the system has become more rather than less important. All of these things
had been explicitly denied by Hardt and Negri, who see a world where
imperialism has ended, the USA has only relative privileges and where the
capitalist economy is thriving (this despite their crude underconsumptionism).

Even points of partial agreement are given radically different interpretations.
For instance, like Hardt and Negri, Wood attaches great importance to the
issue of migration control. But it is interpreted in two almost contradictory
ways. Hardt and Negri put the freedom of movement (‘endless paths’) as the
first of their three summary demands (the others being a social wage for all
and the more mysterious ‘right of reappropriation’) but they also believe that
a great measure of the freedom of movement which they seek has in fact
already been gained by the recent migrations of millions of people from all
over the world into the USA and Western Europe; migration is one way in
which the multitude has already begun to shape the world. Wood, however,
sees it in almost an opposite light:

> Not the least important function of the nation state in globalization is to
  enforce the principle of nationality that makes it possible to manage the
  movements of labour by means of strict border controls and stringent
  immigration policies, in the interests of capital.

Take another example: where Hardt and Negri argue that there has also been
immense progress in recent years in the achievement of a social wage, and
believe this also is evidence of the existing power of the multitude (especially
in the USA), Harvey by contrast sees the erosion of the social wage (the
welfare state and other things) as being a characteristic feature of the new
imperialism which seeks to respond to its chronic crisis by increasing surplus-
value, in part by cheapening the social cost of labour so that room can be
made for tax cuts for the rich.

---

18 Hardt and Negri 2000.
19 Wood 2003, p. 137.
In these two examples, the style of the disagreement is the same: something which, Hardt and Negri on the one hand, and Wood and/or Harvey on the other, all regard as desirable according to the former has been partly achieved or, according to the latter, has not been achieved or has even been clawed back. Once again, in deciding who is right, surely it is necessary to refer to some empirical evidence. I venture to suggest that it would show that neither side is wholly right or wholly wrong. Neither Harvey nor Wood are anything like as empirico-phobic as Hardt and Negri, who shun concrete facts like the plague. Yet both these new books, like so much Marxist writing, would, to my mind, have benefited greatly from taking a more serious approach to the existing evidence about the many empirical questions which they discuss.

Unhappy ending?

Neither Wood nor Harvey has very much to say about how the story they tell will end, or can be ended. They do not aim to put forward a political programme. Wood’s main, and very briefly expressed hope, is that the limits placed on democracy in the various countries of the USA-dominated world will produce ‘truly democratic struggles’ for which ‘there is surely an expanding space’, citing the election of Lula as a positive sign. Harvey foresees more the possibility of change within the USA, with an increasing reaction against coercive methods as their perverse consequences become apparent. He warns against anti-Americanism and urges opponents of imperialism outside the USA to make common cause with those inside. Both of them briefly speculate on whether the USA could be replaced as the dominant power. Wood mentions ‘possible future competitors like China or Russia’ but says that ‘the European Union . . . is potentially a stronger economic power than the US’. Harvey, too, makes brief mention of the possible challenge of Europe or the rise of East Asia. China hardly appears in his argument except as the most effective location at the present time for the investment of surplus capital. Internationally, his hope is that there will be ‘a return to a more benevolent “New Deal” imperialism, preferably arrived at through the sort of coalition of capitalist power that Kautsky long ago envisaged’ (though he does not mention that Kautsky argued that this ultra-imperialism would be worse than the imperialism of 1914). Harvey goes on:

---

21 Wood 2003, p. 156.
...the construction of a new ‘New Deal’ led by the United States and Europe, both domestically and internationally, in the face of the overwhelming class forces and special interests ranged against it, is surely enough to fight for at the present juncture.\textsuperscript{22}

Harvey seems more optimistic that the USA can move back from coercive neoconservatism; Wood seems more optimistic that effective struggles can emerge elsewhere. But, in general, the political conclusions of both are bleak to say the least.

In place of Hardt and Negri’s magical optimism, we have Wood’s and Harvey’s pessimistic realism. A realistic anti-imperialism, however, surely needs a more penetrating analysis of the sources of resistance, which in turn requires a detailed analysis of the beneficiaries and victims of globalisation. Hardt and Negri have been strongly criticised by numerous writers on the Left for their failure to define their revolutionary agent, the multitude. It has become almost obligatory among their critics to dismiss the idea of the multitude as amorphous. Both of these authors make this criticism. But, for all their real interest and insight, neither of these books offer a detailed analysis of the class forces which are ranged against each other in Wood’s world of ‘universal capitalism’ or Harvey’s ‘chronic crisis’. Without an answer to such important questions we do not really have a complete vision of the two superimposed hierarchies of countries and of classes which constitutes an effective theory of imperialism.

\textbf{Arrighi to the rescue?}

The resurgence of debate about imperialism, of which Harvey’s and Wood’s books are a part, continues in the intensely thoughtful response to Harvey by Giovanni Arrighi in the article already referred to. The first part of this is an appreciation rather than a critique of Harvey, especially of the concepts of the ‘spatio-temporal fix’ and ‘accumulation by dispossession’. This is appropriate in view of the fact that many of Harvey’s ideas were greatly influenced by Arrighi’s writings. Arrighi ends the appreciation\textsuperscript{23} by quoting Harvey’s already mentioned conclusion that what is ‘surely enough to fight for at the present juncture’ is a return to some kind of less aggressive

\textsuperscript{22} Harvey 2003, p. 110.
\textsuperscript{23} Arrighi 2005a, p. 50.
New-Deal imperialism, perhaps akin to the ultra-imperialism envisaged (but, I repeat, not advocated) by Kautsky.

It is quoted at that stage without comment, so it is not clear if Arrighi was as shocked as I was to read this apparent call to anti-imperialists of today for a reversion to something which sounds like classical imperialism as a best option. But the rest of Arrighi’s article is an analysis of the dramatic consequences of the invasion of Iraq (which occurred very shortly after the writing of Harvey’s and Wood’s books), drawing from it a conclusion which he posits as a more optimistic alternative to Harvey’s historically retrograde proposal.

He argues very cogently that the invasion (the centrepiece of the neoconservative Project for a New American Century) was a colossal miscalculation by those attempting to shore up US hegemony. In an attempt to preserve its power, the USA has ended up by jeopardising it and, in the process, has given an enormous boost to China as a potential hegemonic challenger. He foresees nothing but worsening problems for the USA as a result of the invasion – more debts, an overstretched military and fewer friends and followers. Time (probably quite a short time) will tell if this judgement is too one-sided. Events, at least up until recently, certainly seemed to be confirming some of it. China, in the meantime, has clearly been using the USA’s difficulties as an opportunity to extend its influence in many African, Asian and Latin-American countries. Chinese corporations have become increasingly daring in buying up ailing and sometimes emblematic Western corporations (IBM computers, Rover cars and so on). And the Pentagon had a strong public attack of nerves about new revelations regarding Chinese military expenditure, not to mention the European Union’s proposal to end the arms sales embargo.

Arrighi concludes that ‘China is the real winner of the War on Terrorism’, its ascent is ‘reminiscent of the US ascent during the world wars of the first half of the twentieth century’ and that the predictable failure of the New American Century project ‘probably marks the inglorious end of the sixty-year long struggle of the United States to become the organization centre of a world state’.24 This is the basis of his optimistic rectification of Harvey:

The debunking of the ‘indispensable nation’ myth does not mean that the United States may not engage in acts of provocation that could spark a conflict with China on a regional and possibly global scale, as envisaged in

24 Arrighi 2005b, p. 115.
Harvey’s worst-case scenario. Nor does it mean that at some point the United States and Europe might not join forces in the kind of ‘ultramperialistic’ project that Harvey considers the only realistic alternative to ‘the raw militaristic imperialism’ of us neo-conservatives. It does mean, however, that both alternatives look less likely today than they did two years ago. And, to more optimistic minds, it may also indicate that less violent and more benevolent alternatives than those envisaged by Harvey are emerging as real historical possibilities.25

Much as I agree with Arrighi’s remarks on the ascent of China, I do not understand why it is a basis for optimism. Is he looking forward to some form of super-imperialism in which China is also a major participant? If so, perhaps we need to know a bit more about the nature of a country which might become our future hegemon or co-hegemon. And that takes us back once again to the question of class. It is a very positive aspect of Arrighi’s article that he recognises so clearly the real material might of China in relation to the USA and Europe. But, as long as China is not analysed in relation to the class interests and conflicts which it contains, it remains a more powerful version of the China of Harvey’s or Wood’s book.

Yes, China is already much more powerful than conventionally realised. But how will its class structure and conflicts determine how that power is used internationally? And what will be the stance of the hundreds of millions of Chinese workers as industrialisation proceeds further? Will they organise independently like their predecessors in Europe and the USA? Will they become a class for itself? Will socialist ideas flourish among them? When will China encounter its own crises of overaccumulation? Can its ruling party hold power without challenge? What do its leaders plan to do when they become the leaders of the world? I do not really know whether or not to feel optimistic or pessimistic about the decline of the devil I know, without more idea of what to expect from the devil I do not. Nor am I particularly optimistic about the prospect of one oppressive ruling class seizing power, or sharing it, with another.

I cannot, of course, complain that Arrighi or Harvey or Wood do not answer such questions when I have no idea how to answer them myself, or even where to look for the answers. But it seems to me that, for the theory of imperialism to advance in a period of acute, possibly imminent, epochal

change in the international power structure, we need more than ever the dual vision to superimpose the hierarchies of class onto those of countries.

And, incidentally, a search of the website of the aforementioned anti-union bookstore for ‘China working class’ produces a meagre 198 results.

References


Robert Brenner

What Is, and What Is Not, Imperialism?

Initially presented as a series of lectures at Oxford in February 2003 as the US prepared to invade Iraq, David Harvey’s The New Imperialism is a rich, provocative, and extraordinarily wide-ranging account of capitalist imperialism in its most recent forms. In order to set the stage, the author offers an interpretation of imperialism in its classic phase between 1884 and 1945, which is intended to constitute the theoretical-cum-historical foundation for all that follows. Against this background, he explains the rise of the US to a position of unprecedented world power in the post-World-War-II era and delineates the nature of its hegemony. This provides the point of departure for Harvey’s account of the new imperialism itself, which he views as a response to the fall in profitability and ensuing problems of capital accumulation in the capitalist core, from the late 1960s right into the present. Harvey’s ultimate goal is to understand the relationship between this new neoliberal imperialism, which reached its culmination under Bush I and Clinton, and the hyper-imperial military-expansionist project of the Bush II administration.

\[1\] I wish to thank Vivek Chibber for his thorough reading of this text and his valuable criticisms and suggestions.
Imperialism in theory and practice: two logics?

Harvey seeks to found his understanding of imperialism in terms of two conceptually distinct, though historically inextricably connected, logics of power. There is what he calls the ‘territorial logic of power’, which is the logic of states, ‘long-lived entities’, which are as a rule ‘confined within fixed territorial boundaries’. This is pursued by state actors, statesmen and politicians, ‘whose power is based in command of a territory and the capacity to mobilize its human and natural resources’. There is also what Harvey calls the ‘capitalist logic of power’, manifested in the ‘molecular processes of capital accumulation’, which ‘flows across and through continuous space, towards or away from territorial entities’ through the daily practices of production, trade, capital flows, and so forth. This is pursued by capitalist firms, which ‘come and go, shift locations, merge, or go out of business’, in the process of individually, atomistically, seeking profits.2 To understand imperialism, says Harvey, ‘the fundamental point is to see the territorial and the capitalist logics of power as distinct from each other’.3 But, granting the distinction in a general way, how should we actually understand it and what exactly are its implications?

Harvey’s answer, at the most general level, is framed in terms of divergent interests, but is not all that clear. ‘To begin with’, he says, ‘the interests of the agents [of capital and the state] differ’. ‘The capitalist... will typically seek to accumulate more capital’, while ‘politicians and statesmen typically seek outcomes that sustain and augment the power of their own state vis-à-vis other states’.4 But the problem is that, although the ensuing logic of capitalist power is crystal-clear, that of territorial power is far from it. Individual agents of capital operating in a field of many capitals have an overriding interest in reinvesting their surpluses, because their survival in competition depends upon it. As a consequence, the logic of capital is readily grasped as expressed in ‘the dynamic of endless accumulation’ or ‘accumulation for its own sake’ – expanded reproduction leading to the growth of the labour force and, almost inevitably, the expansion of the geographical scope of the system. But it would be hard to argue that individual states operating in a field of many states face a parallel constraint and therefore have a corresponding interest qua...
states in territorial expansion. As a consequence, ‘the accumulation of control over territory as an end in itself’,\textsuperscript{5} which Harvey introduces as the expression of the logic of territorial states, lacks a \textit{raison d’être} and there seems little empirical warrant for it. Compare the near-permanence of the borders of the main capitalist states over centuries with the impermanence of capitalist firms, even the greatest of them.

Harvey warns that the literature on imperialism too often mechanismically understands strategies of state and empire in terms of capitalist imperatives and contends that the two logics of power ‘frequently tug against each other, sometimes to the point of outright antagonism’.\textsuperscript{6} But Harvey never tells us why he expects the territorial logic of power and the capitalist logic of power to come into conflict, and his illustrative examples do not make his case. It is clearly right, as he contends, that neither the Vietnam War nor the invasion of Iraq is explicable ‘solely in terms of the immediate requirements of capital accumulation’. It might also be true that both of these ventures ‘inhibit[ed] rather then enhance[ed] the fortunes of capital’ – though the argument would have to be made, as it is far from self-evident.\textsuperscript{7} But it seems obvious that, even if both of these propositions were correct, this would in no way indicate that America’s imperial forays into Vietnam and Iraq expressed a territorial as opposed to a capitalist logic of power. On the contrary, for, as Harvey himself explains, the general international strategy of the US in the postwar epoch – ‘the strategy that set the stage for US intervention in Vietnam’ – was to ‘keep the world as open as possible to capital accumulation through the expansion of trade, commerce, and opportunities for foreign investment’.\textsuperscript{8} The indicated conclusion, with which it is hard to believe that Harvey could disagree, is that the intervention in Vietnam finds its explanation precisely in the logic of capital, not in an alternative logic of territory, rooted in the ‘distinctive interests and motivations’ of the agents of the state.\textsuperscript{9} Harvey’s founding conception of imperialism as a ‘contradictory fusion’ of ‘“the politics of state and empire” (imperialism as a distinctively political project) . . . and

\textsuperscript{5} Harvey 2003, p. 32.
\textsuperscript{6} Harvey 2003, p. 29.
\textsuperscript{7} Harvey 2003, p. 30. For reasons not at all clear, Harvey seems to draw the conclusion here, and on several other occasions, that a foreign policy manifests a conflict between the territorial logic of power and the capitalist logic of power when, as actually implemented, that policy turns out to be counter-productive, the costs outrunning the benefits, especially for capital.
\textsuperscript{8} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{9} Harvey 2003, p. 27.
“the molecular processes of capital accumulation” (imperialism as a diffuse political-economic process)\textsuperscript{10} remains unexplained, the ostensibly conflicting interests or processes that make for contradiction still requiring elucidation.

The bottom line is that it is difficult to specify an actual social force based in the state that possesses interests in conflict with those of capital in terms of foreign policy. No doubt all state bureaucracies, including those involved with foreign policy, have particularistic interests in increasing their size and funding. But it is doubtful that Harvey would want to argue that the US State Department, or the CIA, or even the Department of Defense (or their equivalents elsewhere) have an interest \textit{qua} foreign-policy bureaucracies in pursuing overseas expansion – even if they might want to make use of the ‘foreign threat’ to justify their own aggrandisement. Besides, none of these bureaucracies involved with international affairs constitute agents of the state in the relevant sense: they do not themselves make foreign policy, but serve the foreign-policy makers. On the other hand, is there any reason to believe that the officials who actually do make US foreign policy, so-called state managers in this respect – the President, Secretary of State, National Security Advisor, Secretary of Defense, the heads of the intelligence services, and so forth – constitute a group with a distinct interest deriving from their social positions in the state, an interest leading in the direction of a particular foreign policy, specifically an expansionist one? Does it really make sense to understand any of the teams of state managers who fashioned US imperial policy between World War II and 2000 – headed, notably, by Truman-Acheson, Eisenhower-Dulles, Kennedy-McNamara-Rusk, Nixon-Kissinger, Ford-Kissinger, Carter-Brzezinski, Reagan-Shultz, Bush I-Baker, Clinton-Christopher-Lake – as representing a state interest as opposed to the interests of capital? To ask these questions would seem to answer them.

There can be no doubt, of course, that any persons charged with operating the state have to be concerned with its well-functioning and perpetuation and therefore with the state’s security against foreign dangers. But it is difficult to see how, in this fundamental respect, their interests would be different from that of the capitalist class, as the capitalist class can normally be counted on to view any overseas threat to ‘its’ state as a threat to itself. If agents of the state were obliged to move to defend their state against an external threat in the interest of its survival and effectiveness, capitalists could not generally

\textsuperscript{10} Harvey 2003, p. 26, emphasis added.
be expected to object even if their short-term profits were reduced as a result, since, as a rule, their very property and reproduction depends on the ultimate protection that the state provides.

As it turns out, in developing his actual interpretation of capitalist imperialism – by contrast to the general conceptual framework in which he seeks to nest it – Harvey relies almost exclusively on the standard Marxist conception according to which the state, in both domestic and overseas policy, is dependent upon capital, because those who govern (whoever they might be) will tend to find that the realisation of their own interests (whatever they are) depends on the promotion of capitalist profits and capital accumulation, as the latter are the *sine qua non* for economic growth and financial solvency, and thus for stability domestically and strength internationally. The bottom line, from this standpoint, is that if those in control of government implement domestic or foreign policies that interfere with and disrupt profit-making and capital accumulation, they will face slowed growth or even recession, frustrating the pursuit of whatever goals they are seeking. The general result is the operation of a kind of homeostatic mechanism, which confines government policy to that which is compatible with, or falls within the limits set by, the requirements of capital accumulation. Harvey thus introduces the idea of ‘the accumulation of control over territory as an end in itself’ only to drop it like a hot potato. As he quickly makes clear, in his view,

> [w]hat sets imperialism of the capitalist sort apart from other conceptions of empire is that it is the capitalist logic that typically dominates. . . . From the standpoint of capital accumulation [therefore], imperialist politics entails at the very minimum sustaining and exploiting whatever asymmetrical [exchange relations] and resource endowments can be assembled by way of state power.

This is not only because the ‘state is the political entity . . . best able to orchestrate these processes’, but because it can be expected to do so in its own interests – since ‘[f]ailure so to do will likely result in a diminution of the wealth and power of the state’ itself.

Still, there can be no denying that there is a rational core to what is undoubtedly Harvey’s underlying concern, namely, the potential for a

---

11 Harvey 2003, p. 32.
12 Harvey 2003, pp. 32–3.
13 Harvey 2003, p. 32.
significant gap to open up between a state’s foreign policy and the needs of capital, and the reality of multiple historical examples of this. But, in my view, the way to confront this issue is not by reference to a dubious conflict between the interests of capital and that of states, but, more simply and straightforwardly, by reference to the problematic character of the form of state that historically emerged to carry out the political functions required for the reproduction of capital: the system of multiple states. The nature of capital itself – the social relationships among capitals and between capital and labour which constitute capital – cannot account for this form of state. Abstractly speaking, a single state governing global capital is perfectly conceivable and probably most appropriate from the standpoint of capital. (With advances in communication and transportation, such a state is, moreover, likely already technically feasible, even if there is virtually zero chance of its emergence in the foreseeable future.) That capitalism is governed by multiple states is the result of the historical fact that it emerged against the background of a system of multiple feudal states, and, in the course of its development, transformed the component states of that system into capitalist states but failed to alter the multi-state character of the resulting international system.

But the framework of multiple states potentially poses profound difficulties for the consistent pursuit by individual governments of policies compatible with the requirements of capital, or, put more precisely, for the effective operation of the sort of mechanisms that tend to insure the dependence of the state on capital with respect to domestic policy. The reason is obvious. States can make foreign policy but can control and predict the foreign policy of other states – the reaction of other states to their policies and their own response to these reactions – only to a limited degree. Not only is it the case that foreign policy as actually implemented is always an outcome of the imperfectly co-ordinated actions of multiple states, so that it may easily turn out to contradict the interests of all of them. But, even more to the point, when the latter turns out to be the case, the standard mechanism that tends to keep domestic policy in line with the requirements of capital accumulation – viz. states revising their policy when it is seen to be undermining profits and slowing growth – may be unable to operate, because the necessary revision cannot be accomplished by states acting individually but requires co-ordinated co-operative action among two or more states, which, for any number of reasons, may be impossible to bring about.

What is at stake then is not a question of a state interest in conflict with the interests of capital. As a rule, even groups with strong anticapitalist interests can be counted on, when they come to govern, to implement, to the extent they are able to, international strategies in line with the needs of capital. Witness the continuity of foreign policy, indeed imperialist strategy, when labourist or socialist parties have gained power in advanced capitalist states, most strikingly during the colonial era. But the point is that, even when all states are systematically pursuing the interests of capital accumulation, they may bring about the opposite result. It hardly needs pointing out that states’ political pursuit of the interests of their own national capitals has led them into rivalry and war – this is, of course, the point of departure of the classical-Marxist theories of imperialism. Yet, it is equally obvious that, on all too many occasions, the outcome has gone disastrously against their own interests. Witness World War I. Put most generally, the problem is that the action of any state can easily set off responses by other states that detonate a chain reaction controllable by none of them. Chain reactions of this sort are the stuff of international history and, though not in contradiction with standard historical-materialist premises – since, in most cases, states make every effort to adopt strategies in accord with the requirements of capital accumulation because failing to do so is normally so counterproductive – they are not fully illuminated by those premises, but require analysis in their own terms.

In any case, Harvey’s account of the imperialism of the years 1884–1945 – as well as that of the new imperialism itself – is built directly upon his own understanding of the nature of capitalist expansion and crisis as laid out in his *The Limits to Capital*; \(^{15}\) it turns out to entail the subordination of the territorial logic of power to the capitalist logic of power common to the classical-Marxist theories of imperialism. In Harvey’s vision, in the wake of the capitalist crisis of the late 1840s, huge state infrastructural expenditures detonated the great wave of capital expansion of the third quarter of the nineteenth century, opening the way to the setting down of huge masses of fixed capital, which were, in Harvey’s phrase, ‘spatio-temporally fixed’ in specific territories across the core of the world economy. The extension of these processes made for the appearance of surplus capital – which meant that capital could then only realise itself in the geographical regions where it had already been accumulating

\(^{15}\) Harvey 1982.
at a lower rate of profit than before – and ultimately led to the great capitalist crisis of 1873. The upshot was the requirement for a ‘spatio-temporal fix’ in Harvey’s second sense – viz. the drive to realise surplus capital through the flow of investment into new geographical spheres beyond Europe, notably Africa. Bourgeois forces now seized direct control of the state to insure that investments emanating from their national territories but placed overseas would not only be politically protected like property at home, but favoured over and against other national capitals, usually by way of a monopoly on foreign investment and trade. This they accomplished through the construction of the great colonial empires, but with contradictory consequences. By confining capital investment in their colonies to their own national capitals, the imperial states restricted the overall field for capital accumulation at a time when ever greater masses of surplus capital were searching for outlets for profitable investment, leading eventually to the great depression of the interwar period. Ensuing attempts by states to break into or out of these restricted spheres led to World Wars I and II.

Harvey’s narrative of the evolution of imperialism between 1884 and 1945, which borrows liberally from Hannah Arendt’s *Imperialism*, is far richer and more stimulating than is indicated by this brief schematic outline, and is itself worth the price of admission. The simple point here is that, in telling the story of the imperialism of that epoch, which issued of course in countless geopolitical conflicts and two world wars, Harvey at no point avails himself of the implicit opportunity – seized upon, in countless ways, by other historians and social scientists coming from a great variety of theoretical and ideological standpoints – to make reference to these struggles in order to argue for an antagonism between the logic of capitalist power and the logic of territorial power. In his own interpretation, despite his general theoretical strictures, the great wave of European territorial expansion and its geopolitical consequences is understood, virtually in its entirety, in terms of the imperatives of capital accumulation.

**America’s postwar hegemony in the advanced capitalist world: the end of imperialism?**

For Harvey, the ultimate implication of his argument that imperialism should be understood in terms of the domination of the logic of capitalist power over the logic of territorial power – essentially as state overseas action to
protect and privilege national capital accumulation across international borders – is captured in the following argument of Arendt’s: ‘A never-ending accumulation of property must be based on a never ending accumulation of power,’ with the consequence that the ‘[l]imitless process of capital accumulation needs the political structure of so “unlimited a Power” that it can protect growing property only by constantly growing more powerful’.16

This proposition approximates, albeit in a rough-and-ready way, the classical capitalist imperialism of the years 1884–1945, which witnessed states’ construction of ever larger imperial units that aimed to restrict the economic advantages made possible by formal and informal empires to their own national capitals. This paved the way for ever grander inter-imperial conflict, leading to the construction of ever larger political entities, and issued in two nearly global inter-imperial conflicts, with World War II pitting the American empire and its European imperial allies against the Nazi German empire in alliance with the Italian and Japanese empires – with the Soviet Union, an enemy and target of both these combines, allied successively with the former, the latter, then the former.

Nevertheless, the applicability of Arendt’s logic of never-ending accumulation leading to ever-expanding powers to the decades after World War II, with respect to which Harvey explicitly introduces it, is not immediately apparent. This is because, during that epoch, the European and Japanese states sooner or later lost their empires and could therefore no longer rely on colonies to protect and privilege the foreign direct investment and trade of their national capitals by political-cum-military means (especially colonies); inter-imperialist rivalry leading to warfare ceased to take place; and the US largely refrained from using its overwhelming political dominance within the advanced capitalist world to amplify by political means the already existing economic advantages enjoyed by its corporations over and against potential rivals in Europe and Japan, let alone for territorial aggrandisement. Arendt herself saw the problem, and answered it with the tentative, indeed rather far-fetched, hypothesis that the emerging superpower rivalry between the Soviet Union and its dependents, on the one hand, and the US and its clients, on the other, should be understood as the culmination of the long process of imperial expansion that originated in the 1880s, in which ever-greater political powers arose to protect and privilege ever-greater accumulations of capital/property. If that is indeed the

16 Harvey 2003, p. 34.
case, she concluded, ‘we are back, on an enormously enlarged scale, where we started, that is, in the imperialist era and on the collision course that led to World War I’. We could therefore expect these two great empires possessing politico-economic monopolies within their own spheres to unleash a struggle to dominate Europe.\(^\text{17}\) But, of course, nothing like this ever happened and Harvey, understandably, does not bother to consider Arendt’s diagnosis and prognosis. Still, the question that remains to be answered is in what way it makes sense to speak of the continuation of the same basic tendency charted by Arendt and Harvey for the era of classical imperialism with respect to the advanced capitalist world of the postwar epoch.

To sustain his brief for the continuing centrality of this tendency, Harvey actually entertains, for a short moment, the seemingly Arendtian proposition that

\[
\text{the construction of American imperial power under Roosevelt, Truman, and Eisenhower right through to Nixon... mirrored the subordinate client state approach of the Soviets more than anything else, with the difference that Japan, unlike Hungary or Poland was left free to develop its own economy provided it remained politically and militarily compliant.}^\text{18}
\]

But he does not pursue this line. Instead, Harvey takes as his point of departure the finding of Giovanni Arrighi that ever-more powerful and wide-ranging capital accumulation has been regulated since the end of the Middle Ages by successively more dominant and effective hegemons. Harvey contends that Arrighi’s conclusion mirrors and supports his own and Arendt’s proposition that ever-expanding capital accumulation has called forth the emergence of ever-greater territorial power, and he argues that the latter is fully instantiated in the postwar hegemony of the US, the most far-reaching in history. Nevertheless, this is misleading.

There can be no question, of course, that the American geopolitical power that arose to assert itself after World War II was the greatest in history. Nor can there be any gainsaying that this power was exerted to protect processes of capital accumulation of unprecedented scope and dynamism. But, as Harvey makes perfectly clear, the way in which power was exercised by the US with respect to the advanced capitalist world after 1945 could not have been more

\(^\text{17}\) Arendt 1968, pp. v–vi.  
\(^\text{18}\) Harvey 2003, p. 6.
different from – was virtually the opposite of – the way it was wielded by the imperial powers of the epoch between 1884 and 1945. Classical imperialism was about monopoly and exclusion in the interest of national capitals and naturally led to war. American hegemony, by contrast, as Harvey goes to great lengths to demonstrate, was about the reproduction and expansion of US world power and the pursuit of US capitalist interests through the implementation of international economic and geopolitical strategies that, for the most part, also enabled the realisation of the interests of its economic partners and rivals.

As Harvey shows, therefore, American power, as exercised in Europe and Japan during the first postwar quarter century, protected capital that was not mainly its own. In the immediate postwar years, the American military created the preconditions for the revival of European and Japanese capital by way of the repression of radical working-class resistance, so as to sustain not just capitalist profits but capitalist property itself in both places. It insured the confidence needed for the efflorescence of European and Japanese business by guaranteeing it against the so-called Soviet threat, as well as, to the extent it was possible, the domestic Lefts in these countries. And it prevented for the remainder of the century the outbreak of the sort of large-scale warfare that had historically, time and again, disrupted European and Japanese economic growth. In this pacified geopolitical context, the US state did surprisingly little to secure privileged treatment for American-based business over and against businesses based in the countries of its allies and rivals. On the contrary, it midwifed and sustained across the advanced capitalist economies an international economic order that could hardly have been more favourable to the prosperity of European and Japanese national capitals.

In the wake of World War II, the US initially sought to impose, via the Bretton Woods liberal multilateral order of free trade, free investment, and mobile finance, that so-called ‘equal playing field’ which US firms could not have helped but to dominate by virtue of their vastly superior productiveness and competitiveness. But, as a result, from 1947–8 one witnessed the emergence of disastrously large European trade deficits, the massive flight of capital from Europe to America, the appearance of the ‘dollar glut’, and, ultimately, the real threat throughout Europe of a return to economic autarchy and, even worse, political neutrality. As a result, the US, as Harvey clearly explains, began to function in textbook hegemonic fashion. Despite its own preference for economic liberalism, the US thus allowed, even encouraged, Europe and
Japan to protect their domestic markets, repress finance, put limits on the mobility of capital, and engage in wide-ranging state intervention in support of their national capitals. There can be no doubt, of course, that all this was very much in the interest of US capital, for the booming European economy that emerged offered huge opportunities for US foreign direct investment in Europe, the growth of US international banking, and the increase of US exports. But, it would be hard to argue that the gains of US capital came at the expense of the capital of Europe, let alone Japan. Indeed, by the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Germans and Japanese were seizing US markets across the globe. The outcome of the US state operating in this way for the first postwar quarter century was not, moreover, just relative American decline, but the falling competitiveness of US industry, and a major challenge to US economic dominance.

The simple point is that, in seeking to interpret both classical imperialism (1884–1945) and American hegemony in the advanced capitalist world (1945–2000) in terms of Arendt’s and his own proposed tendency for ever-greater territorial expansion to follow the ever more expanded accumulation of capital, Harvey elides the fundamental question of the difference between the two periods. Why, with respect to the advanced capitalist world, did the imperialist expansion leading to interimperialist rivalry leading to war that prevailed before 1945 fail to obtain after that? Why, with respect to Europe, Japan, and indeed much of East Asia, did American hegemony for much of the postwar period fail to take an imperialist form, in Harvey’s sense of the word – that is, the application of political power to consolidate, exacerbate, and make permanent already-existing economic advantage?

The reason these queries are so pressing is obvious: how we answer them will say much about the form we expect intercapitalist competition to take in the current era. Two not incompatible answers are usually offered for this discontinuity and difference. The first is that the looming presence of the Soviet Union obliged the US to consider the interests and ultimately the autonomy of its capitalist allies to an extent unlikely in its absence. The second is that, by devising and implementing policies that made for European and Japanese economic dynamism, the US was following the best road toward maximising the profits of its own greatest industrial and financial corporations, especially because these corporations were so extraordinarily competitive on a world scale. But, if this response is broadly correct, all else held constant, a controversial conclusion inevitably follows. Given that, by the 1990s, the
Soviet Union had collapsed and clear-cut American industrial supremacy had disappeared – as is evidenced, for example, in the equality if not superiority of output per hour in contemporary (non-southern) Western Europe vis-à-vis that in the US – the indicated conclusion, all else equal, would be that we should now be expecting a sharpening of interimperialist geopolitical rivalry. Of course, the big question is whether all else actually should be held constant. In particular, can the use of force among advanced capitalist states today be advantageous for any of them, even the US, given the extraordinary degree to which the processes of economic internationalisation have rendered capitals inextricably interdependent, wherever they are located? This would be the Kautskyian caveat. On the other hand, even if the latter were compelling in the abstract, in view of the abiding and still very major conflicts of interests among national capitals – and given how easily the mechanisms enforcing the dependence of the state on capital can malfunction – should we not expect attempts by powerful states, above all the US, to tip economic advantage in their own favour through the application of force short of war or through ‘limited war’? In this case, is the renewal of the interimperialist conflict that Lenin thought unavoidable not once again on the near horizon? One thing is certain: a return to the sort of historically-concrete theorising concerning the relationship between modern capitalism and world geopolitics that preoccupied both the Left and Right from the turn of the last century to the end of World War II, but fell off the table for the next half century, is once again on the agenda and could not be more critically important.

**Imperialism, American-style**

Harvey goes to great lengths, in my opinion quite properly, to bring out the hegemonic character of the foreign-policy leadership that the US provided to the advanced capitalist world during the quarter century following World War II and beyond. However, he gives relatively short shrift to the most blatant form of US imperialism in the postwar epoch – its more or less permanent interventionism, across boom and downturn, in the developing world. Harvey could not, of course, be more aware of the horrific historical record, which he explicitly considers on a series of occasions throughout the book, and he goes out of his way to condemn it in no uncertain terms. But the fact remains that he makes little attempt actually to systematically account for America’s relations with the developing world and, far from bringing out
its distinctiveness by comparison to that with Europe, Japan, and East Asia, he tends to assimilate it to his broader analysis of America’s postwar hegemony.

No doubt the standard view on the Left of US interventionism in the Third World – presented most systematically by Chomsky and increasingly accepted in realist accounts of US postwar diplomacy whatever their political provenance – is that it was about making the Third World safe for capitalism by wiping out communist, socialist, and nationalist movements and states. The latter could not be readily tolerated because their goal of bringing about national economic development in the Third World could not be achieved without limiting the freedom of action of the multinational corporations and banks of the advanced capitalist countries. This was because national economic development required (as everywhere else during this era, notably Europe and Japan) a degree of protectionism, controls on the movement of capital, the repression of finance, and the like. The outcome was an unending succession of direct or indirect, usually extraordinarily bloody, US military incursions to bring about the suppression or overthrow of the offending movement or state. There was, in other words, a maximum of force and a minimum of consent, a maximum of dominance and a minimum of hegemony.

Nevertheless, Harvey contends that this is at best half the story, and is both analytically and historically incomplete. Thus,

What critics [like Chomsky, William Blum, John Pilger, and Chalmers Johnson] who dwell solely on [the military interventionist] aspect of US behaviour all too often fail to acknowledge is that coercion and liquidation of the enemy is only a partial, and sometime counterproductive, basis for US power. … If [consent and co-operation] could not be mobilized internationally and if leadership could not be exercised in such a way as to generate collective benefits, then the US would long ago have ceased to be hegemonic.19

But the reply that immediately imposes itself is, why, vis-à-vis the developing world, did the US need to concern itself with being hegemonic? Was domination not its goal, and for the latter, is there any evidence that what was actually required – in practice as opposed to theory – was anything more than extremely large doses of military force?

To instantiate his contention that the US hegemonic project covered the developing, and not just the developed, countries, Harvey argues that the

19 Harvey 2003, p. 38.
international framework established at Bretton Woods – the IMF, World Bank, GATT, and so forth – was designed not just ‘to coordinate growth between the advanced capitalist powers’ but ‘to bring capitalist-style economic development to the rest of the non-communist world’.20 ‘In this sphere the US was not only dominant but also hegemonic’, says Harvey, because it ‘became the main protagonist in projecting bourgeois power across the globe’.21 Thus, ‘armed with Rostow’s theory of “stages” of economic growth, it strove to promote “take-off” into economic development that would promote the drive to mass consumption on a country-by-country basis in order to ward off the communist menace’.22

But is there any evidence that this was actually the case? Harvey goes so far as to contend that, during the postwar boom, ‘US economic imperialism was, with the exception of strategic minerals and oil, rather muted’.23 But he goes on to point out that ‘[t]he US moved from a position of patron of national liberation movements’ – when was this? – ‘to oppressor of any populist or democratic movement that sought even a mildly non-capitalist path’.24 He initially explains this in terms of an unyielding preference for stability based on propertied interests, as compared to democratic turbulence. But he ends up granting that the US supported such ‘savagely dictatorial regimes . . . as those in Argentina in the 1970s, the Saudis, the Shah of Iran, and Suharto . . . since they supported US interests’.25 As a consequence, ‘anti-[-economic] dependency fused with anti-colonialism to define anti-imperialism’.26

Harvey insists on the conclusion that the more general truth is that the US engages in both coercive and hegemonic practices simultaneously, though the exercise between these two facets in the exercise of power may shift from one period to another and from one administration to another.27

But, what he actually shows is that the exercise of coercion rather than hegemony has been distributed not so much temporally, or according to who is President, but geographically – with hegemony fit for regions of advanced
capitalism, domination appropriate for the poor countries of the planet. He has demonstrated, implicitly, moreover, that, for a large part of the globe, the application of force has been quite sufficient for the projection of American power and the achievement of American aims. It is no wonder that today’s Cheneys, Rumsfelds, and neocons – who got their diplomatic education in and political inspiration from, among other places, the long succession of Third-World bloodbaths to which the Reagan Doctrine gave rise – have convinced themselves of the dominant role of force in history. Whether they are correct for capitalism in its latest stage is one of the central unresolved issues for understanding world politics today. There can be no doubt, as Harvey should perhaps have made clearer, that US military intervention across the developing world throughout the length of the postwar era – by destroying not just most of the Left, but virtually every force that favoured independent national development, in the Third Word – was indispensable for creating the preconditions for the neoliberal new imperialism on which Harvey ultimately focuses. Whether it can be of use, or will prove counter-productive, in bringing about the actual implementation of neoliberalism, or in making it more effective and profitable, is a different question ... today being answered in Iraq, among other places.

The economic roots of the ‘new imperialism’:
Which contradictions? What crisis?

Harvey’s account of the origins of the new imperialism post-1973 appears, at first glance, to follow the same lines as that of classical imperialism post-1873: a long boom eventually issues in a crisis of overaccumulation, and, as a response to the latter, efforts on the part of capital to fashion a ‘spatio-temporal fix’. But Harvey does not – as he did with respect to the analogous downturn of the later nineteenth century – frame his account of the onset of economic crisis that began in the later 1960s and the slowed growth that followed in terms of his own theory of overaccumulation leading to surplus capital. Instead, he turns to the ‘profit-squeeze’ approach.

Harvey thus argues that the decline in profitability behind the long downturn resulted from multiple problems of rising costs, as well as a downward squeeze on prices. There was classical imperial over-reach, deriving especially from

---

the costs of Vietnam, which issued in the fiscal crisis of the developmental state. Simultaneously, the rising power of labour directly forced down profits by pushing up wage and social welfare costs. Finally, intensified competition from Germany and Japan, by leading to pressure on prices and market share, made it difficult for American companies to realise their old rates of return. Nevertheless, for Harvey to take up these propositions is self-defeating. This is because, even if they were correct, they could at best explain short-term economic difficulties confined to the US. They could not account for the long-term downturn extending into the present and engulfing not just the US but most of the world economy, which Harvey invokes as the underlying cause of the rise and reproduction of the new imperialism.

Thus, in response to a squeeze on profits arising from the increased power of labour, capital typically reduces investment and employment, while redeploying it to regions where working-class pressure is less intense and wage costs lower, tending thereby to restore profits. In response to state spending that interferes with capital accumulation, governments generally need little encouragement to cut back, especially on social welfare expenditures. As to declining competitiveness, the standard reaction is currency devaluation, which can often go far to even out costs in international terms. Of course, as we know, all these things occurred almost immediately in the wake of the initial fall in profitability, but the problem of profitability nonetheless persisted. There is little evidence for rising working-class power in the US in the years when profitability initially fell. In any case, as a consequence of the intensifying offensive by capital against labour, as well as the deep recession of 1974–5, it was certainly dissipated over the course of the 1970s, when wage growth collapsed. It is doubtful, moreover, that there was much of a fiscal crisis of the US state in this same period, as real government spending did not rise between 1965 and 1973. But even if there had been, it quickly ceased to be a cause for concern, as military expenditures fell when the Vietnam War ended. Finally, between 1969 and 1973, in response to the international monetary crisis and in conjunction with the dismantling of the Bretton Woods system, the value of the dollar was sharply reduced, leading to a major improvement in US competitiveness. There is not, in short, much reason to believe that the factors adduced by Harvey did much damage in the short run, let alone the long run, especially as profitability failed to recover and growth continued to weaken at least until the end of the twentieth century, not only in the US but across the advanced capitalist economies. The global long downturn on
which Harvey builds his account of the new imperialism did continue to plague most of the global economy, even if Harvey’s interpretation of it does not explain it or fit his own broader interpretative purposes.

In light of the weaknesses of the profit-squeeze account, it is especially puzzling that Harvey, in attempting to explain the difficulties that began to grip the world economy from the later 1960s, does not bring to bear his own conceptual framework for understanding capital accumulation over time and space. Precisely how this would be done only he could tell us. But surely his own account of the postwar boom, which can be rendered in terms of his doubly-defined notion of the spatio-temporal fix, offers a promising place to start. As he does the post-1850 expansion, Harvey sees the historic economic expansion of the era following World War II as driven in the first instance by huge public investments – in education, the interstate highway system, and suburbanisation more generally. An enormous geographical expansion of the world economy, which could be interpreted as a ‘spatio-temporal fix’ with respect to the interwar crisis and world depression, was equally fundamental in underpinning the boom. This was marked by the great move by US corporations into the American South and West, as well as into Europe. It also featured an historic boom in Europe and Japan that depended upon exports to the American market, which made possible in turn the growth of US exports and foreign direct investment, especially to Europe. Harvey’s profit-squeeze account of the onset of crisis is limited to the US. But, if he broadened his standpoint to that of the advanced capitalist world as a whole, he could argue that, in the wake of the international boom, one witnessed a spatio-temporal fix in his second sense: the fixing of great blocs of public and private fixed capital in the US, Europe, and Japan, rendering all these economies vulnerable. Against this background, ongoing accumulation thus made for intensified international competition and the emergence of surplus capital on a system-wide basis – leading to profitability crises across the global economy and detonating the long downturn.

**Accumulation by dispossession**

The fall in profitability, its failure to recover, and the ensuing long-term deceleration of the global economy as a whole form the point of departure for Harvey’s account of the new imperialism per se. The corporations of the advanced capitalist countries now unleashed an obsessive drive to find ways
both to increase profitability on existing economic activity and to discover new fields for extracting better returns on investment. Their states did everything they could to facilitate that drive, and Harvey sees the ‘new imperialism’ as a fundamental aspect of this effort, which was featured by the US’s use of its control over the allocation of credit via the IMF and control over access to the American market to pry open the markets of the developing world, especially to core financial services and speculative financial capital. This neoliberal thrust conforms very well to Harvey’s general understanding of imperialism as the ‘promotion of external and international institutional arrangements through which the asymmetries of exchange relations can work to benefit the hegemonic power’ – as well as, we might add, the other leading capitalist powers of Europe and Japan – and Harvey is on strong ground in emphasising, again and again, the way in which the US and its partners intervened to insure that the ‘costs of the devaluation of surplus capitals’ that accompanied the recurrent financial crises of the era ‘[were visited] upon the weakest and most vulnerable territories’ – the LDCs in the early-mid 1980s, the East-Asian NICs in the later 1990s.

But what Harvey wants especially to bring out in his account of the new imperialism is what he sees as the ever-more prominent place of processes analogous to Marx’s so-called primitive accumulation in the global capitalist response to overaccumulation and surplus capital, and the major new fields these processes opened up to capitalist profit-making as a result. Harvey’s discussion of what he terms ‘accumulation by dispossession’ is among the most thought-provoking in the book. His insistence that these processes have been central to the entire history of capitalism, not just its origins, cannot be gainsaid, though it is hard to see why he seems to think Marx might have been reticent about admitting this. Moreover, Harvey’s extension of the concept to cover the processes by which the statist economies of the Soviet bloc and China were transformed in a capitalist direction, by which state industries in both the advanced and developing economies were privatised, and by which hitherto essentially free or state-dispersed use-values, like water and air, have been and are being commoditified is quite illuminating and opens the way to further theorising. His list of the astonishing number of ways in which corporations, with or without the help of the state, are ripping off precious use-values embedded in precapitalist, often communal, relationships in

---

29 Harvey 2003, p. 181.
30 Harvey 2003, p. 185.
the Third World, and transforming them into capitalist wealth is of great political importance – even if these processes are more akin to Adam Smith’s notion of original accumulation, which could refer to any mass of wealth transhistorically understood, than Marx’s primitive accumulation, which entailed the bringing into being of the social-property relations constitutive of capital. But Harvey’s further inclusion under the notion of ‘accumulation by dispossession’ of processes and state policies quite normally associated with capital accumulation where capitalist social-property relations already hold sway blurs his conceptualisation and blunts the basic thrust of his argument.

The essence of the notion of so-called primitive accumulation and, in turn, of Harvey’s accumulation by dispossession, is the break-up of that ‘merger’ of land, labour, and tools that distinguish pre- and non-capitalist economies – as well as, for Harvey, nationalised sectors within capitalist economies – and the resulting subjection of those factors of production to the logic of capitalist profit-making. That merger – which is an expression of the politically-constituted pre- and non-capitalist property relations that structure these economies and sectors – renders the direct producers independent from the capitalist market for necessary inputs, shields them from competition, blocks access to their outputs or means of production through trade or investment, and endows them with a greater or lesser freedom to pursue other economic goals besides profit maximisation. The consequences are two-fold: (i) capital, in the normal course of its own self-expansion on an extended scale, finds it difficult or impossible to gain access to the producers of these economies and sectors and their means of production; (ii) the states and other sorts of political community that control these economies and sectors are cushioned from direct economic-competitive pressure to transform property relations so as to subject them to the logic of capitalist profit-making. For this reason, the processes of creating the sociopolitical preconditions for the expanded reproduction of capital – the province of the primitive accumulation of capital and, by extension, of accumulation by dispossession – must be strictly distinguished from capital accumulation itself. In turn, as Harvey rightly goes out of his way to emphasise, state action or political action more generally is required for – indeed fundamental to – the primitive accumulation of capital or accumulation by dispossession.

By this reasoning, what makes the primitive accumulation and accumulation by dispossession such essential concepts is precisely the implied recognition
that capital is powerfully limited in the degree to which it can create the conditions for its own expansion. This, in turn, puts the spotlight, both conceptually and empirically, on the difficult question of why, when, and how states and other political actors move to create those conditions. This is a question posed with special force with respect to economies structured by pre- and non-capitalist social-property relations, for in these social formations states and ruling classes are themselves merged, with the consequence that the ruling class depends for its economic reproduction on the state and the system of exploitation that the state makes possible, giving it a strong interest, at least in the first instance, in the perpetuation of the existing order, not its transformation into capitalism. It is because both precapitalist ruling classes and peasants tend to sustain the existing precapitalist property forms through which they reproduce themselves that Rosa Luxemburg put the emphasis on the way in which the imperialism of her epoch, highlighted by the pursuit of colonies, detonated processes of primitive accumulation (or accumulation by dispossession), thereby opening the way to the extension of capital accumulation into the periphery. Luxemburg spells out the interrelationships as follows:

Since the primitive associations of the natives are the strongest protection for their social organizations and for their material bases of existence, capital must begin by planning for the systematic destruction and annihilation of all non-capitalist social units which obstruct its development. . . . Each new colonial expansion is accompanied, as a matter of course, by a relentless battle of capital against the social and economic ties of the natives, who are also forcibly robbed of their means of production and labour power. . . . Accumulation, with its spasmodic expansion can no more wait for, and be content with, a natural internal disintegration of non-capitalist formations and their transition to a commodity economy, than it can wait for, and be content with, the natural increase of the working population. Force is the only solution open to capital; the accumulation of capital, seen as an historical process, employs force as a permanent weapon, not only at its genesis, but further on down to the present day. From the point of view of the primitive societies involved, it’s a matter of life or death; for them there can be no other attitude than opposition and fight to the finish. . . . Hence permanent occupation of the colonies by the military. 31

For analogous reasons, it makes good sense for Harvey to draw the connection, as he does, between the downward pressure on profitability in the core of the world economy from the later 1960s and the ensuing intensification of imperialist pressure by core states to unleash across the globe the socio-economic transformations entailed by accumulation by dispossession. These states had the goal of opening up to capitalist profit making not just major previously protected economic sectors – like the agriculture in Mexico that had hitherto been organised through ejidos that sustained peasant possession or the manufacturing industries in Brazil, Argentina, and elsewhere that had previously been operated under state ownership – but entire statist economies that had been previously off-limits to capital (the Soviet bloc and China). But, that said, it is equally important to bring out very clearly, as Harvey certainly does, that these transformations are incomprehensible simply in terms of the needs of capital accumulation on a global scale or even of the demands of the leading capitalist states, let alone as a straightforward outcome of capital accumulation itself. By their very nature, they need to be grasped not just in the global context of the long downturn and core governments’ efforts to restore the profitability of core capitals, but also in their own terms, by reference to domestic economic developments and internal political conflicts.

But, if the employment of the notion of accumulation by dispossession, like that of primitive accumulation, is intended to make clear that capital accumulation is strictly limited in the extent to which it can create the socio-political conditions for its own expansion and to call attention to the political conflicts and social struggles that are required to bring about the subjection of pre- and non-capitalist economies and sectors to the logic of capital, it sows confusion to assert, as does Harvey, that ‘capitalism necessarily and always creates its own other’, as this might convey precisely the opposite impression. It is, moreover, downright counterproductive to assimilate to accumulation by dispossession, as he also does, a virtual grab bag of processes – by which claims to assets are transferred from one section of capital to another, exploitation of the working class is made worse, or the state moves to privilege its own capitalists at the expense of others – that are quite normal aspects or by-products of the already well-established sway of capital.

The beating out by agribusiness of family farms – who have already been living and dying by maximising profits – is an all-too-familiar aspect of capitalist competition. It is hard to fathom why Harvey would want to assimilate this to accumulation by dispossession any more than he would the destruction of
family businesses (small or large) by giant corporations; likewise for the loss by Enron workers of their pensions along with their jobs when the firm went out of business. It deprives accumulation by dispossession of its substance to treat as the same sort of thing workers’ loss of employment through their firm’s bankruptcy, which is a standard result of a well-established process of capital accumulation, and the expropriation of peasants from their land – in the English enclosures of the eighteenth century or through the destruction of the ejidos in contemporary Mexico – which is about creating the conditions for capital accumulation. The same goes for the enormous shifts of ownership claims that commonly result from the operations of the sharks of finance capital in the ever more baroque markets that they create and occupy, which Harvey inexplicably also categorises under accumulation by dispossession. It is not just that these transfers tend, to a very large degree, to take place among the capitalists themselves. It is also that the huge redistributions of income and wealth away from workers that are indeed sometimes entailed by the operations of financial markets are, for the most part, no less straightforward results of the capitalist game than is exploitation through the purchase of labour-power. Why would we want to classify as accumulation by dispossession the normal capitalist process of exploitation that takes place when workers take on consumer credit at ‘usurious’ rates, a direct expression of their propertylessness, unless we also wish to classify as accumulation by dispossession workers’ sale of their labour-power itself? Pace Harvey, moreover, nothing very different is at stake when workers lose their homes as a consequence of being unable to service their loans as a result of an increase in the rate of interest or a negative shift in their own financial condition.  

Harvey goes so far as to view as examples of accumulation by dispossession the devaluations of capital and labour – and their subsequent sale at bargain-basement prices – that have accompanied several recent region-wide capitalist crises, on the grounds that these were, ostensibly, artificially detonated by the US government, with the East-Asian financial meltdown of 1997–8 as the key example. This ignores the fact that this latter crisis is perfectly explicable in terms of the NICs’ own emergent problems of excessive manufacturing investment, their enormous burden of debt, and their looming financial bubbles, against a background of global overcapacity in manufacturing, so

---

32 Harvey 2003, pp. 152–3.
needs no reference to an American conspiracy to explain them. It also accepts at face value what would seem to me the dubious hypothesis that, in view of the profound, inextricable interconnection of the fates the world’s capitals in today’s global economy, the US would intentionally risk a global collapse by setting off a regional conflagration, especially in East Asia. As it was, the world economy came within a hair’s breadth of system-wide meltdown in September-October 1998, as Harvey himself recognises. But, most directly to the present point, to include this sort of process under the heading of accumulation by dispossession would open the way to assimilating to this category virtually any step a capitalist state might take to politically privilege its own national capitals at the expense of those of another capitalist economy – protection, subsidies, currency manipulations, and so on. It may be because Harvey ends up with such an extraordinarily expansive (and counterproductive) definition of accumulation by dispossession that he can make the otherwise incomprehensible assertion that ‘accumulation by dispossession . . . has become the dominant form of accumulation relative to expanded reproduction’. With his notion of accumulation by dispossession, Harvey has done an impressive job of reviving Marx’s primitive accumulation, adapting it for the present day, and demonstrating its value in understanding contemporary neoliberal imperialism. Why inflate the concept out of existence?

Iraq
Harvey’s ultimate objective is to understand Bush II’s Middle East adventure against the background of the neoliberal imperialism that consolidated itself during the previous quarter century. His point of departure is that the global dominance of neoliberalism and the associated new imperialism across the 1990s ultimately proved self-destructive. It issued at the end of this ‘fabulous decade’ (for finance) in a series of regional crises that undermined its potential for continuing to yield big profits for core capitals in the developing world, and, most symptomatically, in the collapse of the ‘new economy’ boom in the US, Europe, Japan, and the NICs in 2000–1. Taking advantage of the resulting partial discrediting of the Rubin-Summers vision for the global political economy and, above all, 9/11, a new group led by Cheney, Rumsfeld, and the neocons – with a material base in the military-industrial complex

and a few key industries such as energy and agribusiness – seized the reins of power with a programme for global empire that they had been nurturing for at least a decade. For Harvey, their basic goal was to impose a new, much tighter political order and discipline at home and abroad, so as to enable an even less restrained global capital to flourish – a much more militarised old-fashioned imperialism to serve a much more intense neoliberalism. The coup de grace was to be the takeover of Middle-East oil, not so much in the interest of the oil industry, but as an instrument of economic and geopolitical power. Especially given its increasing scarcity worldwide, says Harvey, ‘whoever controls the Middle East controls the global oil spigot and whoever controls the global oil spigot can control the global economy’. His conclusion follows inexorably: US moves across the world and especially in the Middle East to gain control of world oil are about countering economic decline by giving the US ‘effective control over the global economy for the next fifty years’. ‘What better way’, asks Harvey, ‘for the US to ward off that competition and secure its own hegemonic condition than to control the price, conditions, and distribution for the key economic resource upon which its competitors rely?’

Although completed by the middle of 2003, Harvey’s account offers a powerful and insightful way into the enormously ramified question of ‘Why Iraq?’ and more broadly, what Bush II is all about. Three years later, these questions have become far too large to adequately confront here. Two brief comments will have to suffice.

It seems to me that Harvey offers the indispensable point of departure for understanding the invasion of Iraq and its sequels when he emphasises the enormous shift in political-economic perspective entailed by the Bush II offensive and, in turn, the new and distinctive alliance of forces that detonated it. As of 2000, a near unanimity on the Left, and more broadly, would have confidently predicted that the US-IMF intervention in Korea and the entry of China into the WTO would be emblematic of the dominant form of contemporary imperialism for as far into the future as the eye could see and that the concerns of the movement for global justice would remain at the forefront of left concerns. Just about no one would have predicted the return to spectacular military initiatives, indeed global geopolitical offensives,

---

34 Harvey 2003, p. 19.
35 Harvey 2003, p. 25.
that we have seen under Bush II, as the dominant mode of contemporary imperialism – even if they had been told that the Vietnam syndrome would be rendered entirely inoperative – or that the construction of a global antiwar movement would become the greatest imperative of the Left’s organising. Harvey’s volume takes the first steps toward confronting the question of why that was then and this is now. A chief task for the present is to follow his lead and continue that work.

Harvey’s version of ‘it’s all about oil’ is, at least to me, far less promising or convincing. Is it really conceivable that world oil, today capitalism’s most globalised and profitable industry, would be subjected – in its production, pricing, distribution, and so forth – to government regulation by the most free-market, oil industry-dominated régime in American history? Even if this was desired, how could it actually be made to happen, given the inability even of OPEC to determine prices for most of the period between 1980 and 2000? Even if this was envisioned and possible, how – in view of the small proportion of oil in the total input costs of most corporations – could this help US industry to revive, unless the disparity between the prices imposed on non-US companies and those allowed to US companies were so great as to render inevitable the most systematic retaliation on the part of America’s rivals, totally disrupting the world economy? How, indeed, would US companies be distinguished from non-US ones, not least in oil? None of this seems realistic to the slightest degree.

On the other hand, any attempt by the US to use control over the oil spigot as a geopolitical weapon, by withholding oil from an opponent to extract concessions, would be considered tantamount to war – as in World War II, when the US sought to close off the supply of oil to Japan. But if the US were willing essentially to declare war by preventing another nation from accessing Middle-East oil, there would be no need to invade the Middle East in order to do so. It could merely use its control of the air and the sea to interdict the flow from that region. Harvey says that ‘any future military conflict with, say, China, will be lopsided if the US has the power to cut off the oil flow to its opponent’. But, if Harvey is right about this premise, then the US has nothing to worry about from China, since it already has that power.
As should be obvious by this point, David Harvey’s *The New Imperialism* covers the waterfront. It offers challenging interpretations of an extraordinarily wide range of key issues relating to the operation of global capitalism today. It deserves the widest readership and most serious scrutiny.

**References**


Sam Ashman and Alex Callinicos

Capital Accumulation and the State System: Assessing David Harvey’s The New Imperialism

David Harvey’s The New Imperialism is an important book. In the first place, it addresses one of the questions of the day, the nature of, and the forms currently taken by, imperialism. Secondly, in confronting this problem, Harvey brings to bear the considerable intellectual resources offered by one of the most distinguished bodies of writing in contemporary Marxist political economy. Already in The Limits to Capital, he had sketched out elements of a theory of imperialism within the framework of his broader account of the forces driving capitalism into crises of overaccumulation. But The New Imperialism develops a much more systematic theory, while at the same time not losing sight of the larger themes explored by Harvey in his earlier work.1

Thirdly, despite some limitations, Harvey’s analysis has much to commend it. He interprets the Iraq War as a kind of pre-emptive strike by the right-wing Republicans controlling the Bush administration designed both to send a message to potential ‘peer

1 For a brief assessment of Harvey’s intellectual trajectory see Callinicos 2006. We are grateful to Ben Fine and the editorial board of Historical Materialism for their helpful comments on this article in draft.
competitors’ of the United States such as the European Union and China and, by entrenching the American military presence in the Middle East, to tighten Washington’s grip on access to the region’s oil, on which these rival powers are heavily reliant. More than that, in developing this analysis, Harvey conceptualises capitalist imperialism as arising from ‘a dialectical relation between territorial and capitalistic logics of power. The two logics are distinctive and in no way reducible to each other, but they are tightly interwoven.’² This formulation corresponds closely to our own view, according to which ‘[t]he Marxist theory of imperialism analyses the forms in which geopolitical and economic competition have become interwoven in modern capitalism’.³ The fact that theorists from different backgrounds should arrive quite independently at similar conceptualisations of imperialism is a welcome sign of the potentially very fertile cross-currents on the contemporary radical Left.

Our comments on The New Imperialism are offered, therefore, very much in the spirit of a dialogue that can help to clarify and strengthen shared understandings. In what follows, we first discuss Harvey’s position on the nature of contemporary interimperialist rivalries, we seek to clarify the relationship between economic and geopolitical competition, and we express some reservations about the sometimes very strong claims that Harvey makes for the role of what he calls ‘accumulation by dispossession’ in contemporary capitalism. In particular, we dissent from the support he occasionally gives to the idea that advanced – and especially US – capitalism is today predominantly predatory. We argue instead that contemporary capitalism continues to derive its profits from the exploitation of wage-labour, and that this process continues to be concentrated primarily in the OECD region, with the very important addition of China. As is clear from Harvey’s more recent A Brief History of Neoliberalism, this assessment does not differ significantly from his own predominant view.⁴ The bulk of our article was written before the appearance of this book, and we refer to it only when it is directly relevant to our argument.

² Harvey 2003, p. 183.
³ Callinicos 2003, p. 106.
⁴ Harvey 2005b.
The end of interimperialist rivalries?

It is worth first situating Harvey in the contemporary debate on imperialism. One of the biggest disputes in Marxist political economy concerns whether capitalism today functions primarily through transnational networks of power, as, in different ways, Hardt and Negri and theorists of the emergence of a transnational capitalist class all affirm.\(^5\) But even some of those who deny this nevertheless argue that global capitalism is no longer liable to the kind of interimperialist rivalries on which Lenin and Bukharin focused. Thus Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin argue that the advanced capitalist world has been integrated, relatively non-conflictually, within the informal empire of the United States. Others disagree, contending that, despite the asymmetries of power between the US and even the strongest of the other capitalist states, Great-Power rivalries remain a significant feature of contemporary global political economy.\(^6\)

Where does Harvey fit into these debates? In *The Limits to Capital*, he put forward a very strong theory of interimperialist rivalries, which he interpreted as the efforts of rival powers to shift the burden of capital devaluation onto one another. The direction of his argument is indicated by the title of the book’s concluding section: ‘Inter-Imperialist Rivalries: Global War as the Ultimate Form of Devaluation’.\(^7\) *The New Imperialism* is framed somewhat differently, drawing as it does on Giovanni Arrighi’s theory of global capitalist hegemones. But, despite a glancing reference to the emergence of ‘[s]ome sort of transnational capitalist class’, Harvey highlights the significance of actual and potential conflicts among the leading capitalist states. Thus he notes the possibility of

increasingly fierce international competition as multiple dynamic centres of capital accumulation compete on the world stage in the face of strong currents of over-accumulation. Since they cannot all succeed in the long run, either the weakest succumb and fall into serious crises of local devaluation or geopolitical struggles arise between regions. The latter can get converted via the territorial logic of power into confrontations between states in the form of trade wars and currency wars, with the ever-present danger of

\(^5\) See, for example, Hardt and Negri 2000 and Robinson 2004.
\(^6\) Compare Panitch and Gindin 2003 and Callinicos 2005b.
\(^7\) See Harvey 1982, pp. 437–45.
military confrontations (of the sort that gave us two world wars between capitalist powers in the twentieth century) lurking in the background.8

Like Arrighi, then, Harvey puts the emphasis on the decline of US hegemony, its descent into what the former calls, following Ranajit Guha, ‘dominance without hegemony’ – into, that is, increasing reliance on coercion as its ability to mobilise the consent of the other leading capitalist states in ‘a non-zero-sum game in which all parties benefit’ degrades.9 It is, however, fair to say that Harvey’s portrayal of the conflicts among the Great Powers is more open-ended than Arrighi’s, with much emphasis laid on the EU, even though he generally sees China as a more important potential challenger; there is, moreover, no hint in The New Imperialism of the cyclical philosophy of history that informs Arrighi’s account of the rise and fall of capitalist hegemonies and that leads him to predict that East Asia will displace the US. The closest that Harvey’s comes to any such prediction is when he suggests that, in the opposition of France, Germany, Russia, and China to the invasion of Iraq, ‘it became possible to discern the faint outlines of a Eurasian power bloc that Halford Mackinder long ago predicted could easily dominate the world geopolitically’; he interprets the seizure of Iraq as a step in the creation of ‘a powerful US military bridgehead’ in Mackinder’s Heartland ‘with at least the potential to disrupt any consolidation of a Eurasian power’.10 But this – some might think – fairly speculative scenario is at least indicative of Harvey’s view of Great-Power conflict as a fluid moving equilibrium among a multiplicity of ‘dynamic centres of accumulation’ rather than mere twitches in the blanket of US hegemony or the secular rise and fall of hegemons. Since we broadly share this conception, the focus of the rest of this paper is two different issues. First, Harvey’s conceptualisation of imperialism itself and, secondly, the stress that he lays on the role played in contemporary capitalism by what he calls ‘accumulation by dispossession’.

Logics of power and forms of competition

As we have seen, Harvey understands capitalist imperialism as ‘a dialectical relation between territorial and capitalistic logics of power’. The significance

---

8 Harvey 2003, pp. 186, 124.
9 Harvey 2003, p. 37. See, for example, Arrighi 2005a and 2005b.
10 Harvey 2003, p. 85.
of calling this relationship a dialectical one is that it rules out any attempt to reduce one of its terms to the other. In a key passage Harvey writes:

The relation between these two logics should be seen, therefore, as problematic and often contradictory (that is, dialectical) rather than as functional or one-sided. The dialectical relationship sets the stage for an analysis of capitalist imperialism in terms of the intersection of these two distinct but intertwined logics of power. The difficulty for concrete analyses of actual situations is to keep the two sides of this dialectic simultaneously in motion and not to lapse into either a solely political or a predominantly economic mode of argumentation.11

We defend the method Harvey proposes below. But some care is required to specify what precisely is being related in this dialectical fashion. Harvey takes the distinction between capitalist and territorial logics of power from Arrighi, according to whom they must be conceived as:

opposite modes of rule or logics of power. Territorialist rulers identify power with the extent and populousness of their domains, and conceive of wealth/capital as a means or a by-product of the pursuit of territorial expansion. Capitalist rulers, in contrast, identify power with the extent of their command over scarce resources and consider territorial acquisitions as a means and a by-product of the accumulation of capital.12

Arrighi has pointed out that Harvey’s use of this distinction differs from his own: ‘In his, the territorialist logic refers to state policies, while the capitalist logic refers to the politics of production, exchange and accumulation. In mine, in contrast, both logics refer primarily to state policies.’13 Indeed, in the passage last cited from Harvey, we see very clearly how he understands the capitalist and territorial logics not, as Arrighi does, as ‘modes of rule’, but in terms of the distinction between the economic and the political. Harvey has also spoken of ‘imperialism as the outcome of tension between two sources of power. One is a territorial source of power lying in state organizations. The other is the capitalist logic of power, which is the control of money and assets, and the flow and circulation of capital.’14

12 Arrighi 1994, p. 33, emphasis added.
13 Arrighi 2005a, p. 28, n. 15.
14 Harvey 2005a.
Whatever the merits of Arrighi’s original distinction, we think that Harvey is better served by his actual usage, which converges with our own preferred conception of capitalist imperialism as the intersection of two forms of competition, economic and geopolitical. This way of thinking about imperialism has three particular merits. First, it sets imperialism within one of the two constitutive dimensions of the capitalist mode of production – namely, competition between capitals (the other is, of course, the exploitation of wage-labour). From a historical perspective, we can see the emergence of imperialism in the late nineteenth century as the moment when interstate rivalries are subsumed under competition among ‘many capitals’, and restructured as a specific form of this competition, as Harvey insists, intertwined with but not reducible to economic competition. Secondly, thus conceiving imperialism as the intersection of economic and geopolitical competition avoids the implication that might be taken from the distinction between capitalist and territorial logics of power that capital itself does not need to define itself spatially – a proposition whose falsehood Harvey’s intellectual career has demonstrated. Thus he himself makes the point that ‘a certain, informal porous but nevertheless identifiable territorial logic of power – “regionality” – necessarily and unavoidably arises out of the molecular processes of capital accumulation in space and time’.

Thirdly, the dialectical relationship constitutive of imperialism can more securely conceptualised when it is specified by considering the interests of two (in principle) distinct groups of actors, namely capitalists and state managers. One could, for example, use Robert Brenner’s concept of the rules of reproduction of different classes of agents occupying particular places in the relations of production – that is, of the specific strategies that these agents must pursue in order to maintain themselves in these positions. It is plausible to think of capitalists’ rules of reproduction as defined by the objective of maintaining – that is, in the dynamic conditions of competitive accumulation, expanding – their capital: should they fail to do so, then the capital is likely to go bankrupt or be absorbed by a stronger and more successful capital.

---

15 See Callinicos 2004b, §4.4.
16 Harvey 2003, p. 103. There are intriguing analogies between Harvey’s very suggestive conceptualisation of the ‘territorial logic of power’ generated by the molecular processes of capital accumulation and Chris Harman’s historical account of the interaction between state power and local networks of productive capital: compare Harvey 2003, pp. 101–8, and Harman 1991, pp. 7–10.
Those of state managers, by contrast, would focus on maintaining the power of their state against other states and over the population subject to its rule: failure would undermine their control over that population and therefore their ability to extract resources leading, at the extreme, to the downward spiral into state collapse that the unhappy inhabitants of countries such as Somalia, Sierra Leone, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo have experienced in recent decades.¹⁸

Evidently, these different rules of reproduction entail that capitalists and state managers will often assess their interests differently. Consider, for example, the widespread scepticism about invading Iraq expressed in American business circles, including the oil industry. Nevertheless, the rational pursuit of these different interests makes capitalists and state managers mutually dependent. Capitalists, of course, need the state to secure the general conditions of capital accumulation, but they also often require more specific support from a particular state with which those own interests are associated – for example, in the contemporary world economy, through its role in trade negotiations at the WTO. From the perspective of state managers, their command over resources and hence their ability to maintain the power of their state internally and externally will, other things being equal and given the global dominance of the capitalist mode of production, depend on the size and profitability of the capitals based in their territory: this gives state managers a positive interest in promoting the process of capital accumulation within their borders and makes them liable, should they be perceived to be pursuing policies inimical to this process, to the negative sanctions of capital flight, currency and debt crises, and the like.¹⁹

Thinking of the relationship between capitalists and state managers – and, more broadly, that between capital and state – in these terms, as one of

---

¹⁸ The rules of reproduction of state managers therefore embrace, though are not reducible to geopolitics: a state that is unable to control its own territories is, however, likely to invite external intervention from neighbours and even Great Powers, as the African examples cited above indicate. The domestic and geopolitical dimensions of state power are thus interrelated.

¹⁹ This argument develops one first, as far as we know, clearly stated by Fred Block: see Block 1987, Chapters 3–5. Effectively the same approach is taken in Miliband 1983 and Harman 1991. The argument as stated has one critical lacuna, namely it does not explain the existence of a plurality of states, but properly to address this problem would require a much longer article: for some pertinent thoughts, see Callinicos 2004a and 2007. Even if the argument were extended to deal with this problem, it would still only constitute one element of a satisfactory Marxist theory of the state. Ed Rooksby in his doctoral research at the University of York is seeking to develop a synthesis of Block and Poulantzas in order to clarify contemporary socialist strategy.
structural interdependence avoids any danger of reducing the state to an instrument of capital, or indeed the interests of either group of actors to those of the other: both capitalists and state managers are accorded an active role as the initiators of strategies and tactics designed to promote their own distinct interests, while, at the same time, the pursuit of these initiatives brings them into partnership with each other. Of course, the modalities of this relationship vary significantly as capitalism develops: Harman traces the historically different articulations of state and capital, including what Colin Barker calls ‘the state as capital’ – that is, the trend most pronounced in the mid-twentieth century for the state managers take on an increasing, and sometimes (not only in the Soviet Union) the lion’s share of the direction of the accumulation process itself.20 But even this limit-case can only be properly understood starting from the distinct interests and reproduction strategies of capitalists and state managers.

Failure to take these – and hence the related dimensions of economic and geopolitical competition – properly into account is likely to be very costly both analytically and politically. Here we return to the problem highlighted by Harvey of how ‘to keep the two sides of this dialectic simultaneously in motion’. The realist school in international relations is one way of not keeping the two sides in motion by treating what happens at the level of the international as purely the outcome of the interactions of states, which are in turn conceived as atomistic, unitary, and (instrumentally) rational actors. Marxists often make the opposite error, effacing the geopolitical by seeking consistently to find economic causes for all state policies and actions. One contemporary example is offered by Brenner, who denies that seizing Iraq could be rationally justified by the interests of American imperialism since US global hegemony was secure thanks to the policy of neoliberal globalisation pursued by Clinton, and Middle East oil was readily available on world markets: the Bush administration’s geostrategy reflects a convergence of crazed neocons and US corporations desperate, thanks to the long-term crisis of profitability, to make a buck through the dismantling of the welfare state at home and/or the plunder of Iraq.21

Now, it would be silly to deny that irrationality, stupidity, and plain insanity do not figure in the making of foreign policy, particularly in the case of the

---

20 Barker 1978.
21 Brenner has put forward this analysis on a number of occasions, notably in the session on imperialism at a day-school on his work organised jointly by Historical Materialism and International Socialism in London on 14 November 2004.
US. A vast amount of commentary has been devoted to the manifold errors and miscalculations committed by the Bush administration when conquering and occupying Iraq – indeed, they have been taken by some as signs of America’s inherent incapacity for empire. But, when all these have been factored in, does it follow that there is no geostrategic justification for the war in Iraq? To take Brenner’s cue and conclude that it does, unless some directly economic motivation can be discovered, is in effect to deny geopolitical competition any specificity, to treat it as a mere screen behind which economic interests are asserted. It is just such a move that it seems to us conceptualising the relationship between the state and capital as one of structural interdependence serves to block. Taking the geopolitical seriously then allows us, then, in the case of Iraq, to set the Bush administration’s global policy in the context of the variations in grand strategy pursued by the US since its inception, as John Lewis Gaddis has invited us to do in a brilliant brief essay.

Adopting this perspective does not imply that that economic and geopolitical competition must be conceptualised as separate spheres. Precisely because of their interdependence, at least some state managers and capitalists will tend to formulate strategies encompassing both economics and politics. In the case of capitalists, this may take the form of the kind of corporate lobbying that has been shown to have played a critical role in contemporary neoliberal globalisation, but it can also embrace much more ambitious initiatives such as those that some scholars have detected in the development of Atlantic corporate liberalism after the Second World War. Meanwhile, state strategists, in assessing the dangers and opportunities facing their state, are likely to consider its place in the global economy relative to its actual and potential competitors. Among the neoconservatives, for example, Paul Wolfowitz has been quite explicit in highlighting the destabilising impact on the US-dominated global order of the rise of new economic powers in East Asia.

The nature and limits of accumulation by dispossession

Having clarified and defended Harvey’s concept of imperialism, we now turn to considering another widely noticed aspect of his book, the argument that,
during the 1980s and 1990s, “accumulation by dispossession” . . . became a much more central feature within global capitalism (with privatization as one of its key elements’). Harvey comes at this concept through a critique of what he sees as the misleading contrast the Marx draws between the capitalist mode of production as a ‘normal’, self-reproducing system, as it is portrayed in the bulk of Capital, and the violent processes of ‘primitive accumulation’ that are the subject of Part 8 of Volume I:

The disadvantage of these assumptions is that they relegate accumulation based on predation, fraud, and violence to an ‘original stage’ that is considered no longer relevant or, as with Luxemburg, as being somehow ‘outside of’ capitalism as a closed system.

The problem with this is that ‘[a]ll the features of primitive accumulation that Marx mentions have remained powerfully present within capitalism’s historical geography up to now’. Harvey accordingly uses the expression ‘accumulation by dispossession’ to refer to them.26

Harvey has two explanations of the persistence, and indeed rising profile of accumulation by dispossession. First, even though he rejects Luxemburg’s underconsumptionist theory of crisis – and the conclusion she draws that capital must find non-capitalist purchasers of its commodities, he nevertheless agrees that capitalism necessarily and always creates its own ‘other’. The idea that some sort of ‘outside’ is necessary therefore has relevance. But capitalism can either make use of some pre-existing outside (non-capitalist social formations or some sector within capitalism – such as education – that has not yet been proletarianized) or it can actively manufacture it.27

Secondly, Harvey puts accumulation by dispossession in the context of the devaluation of capital through which capitalists respond to crises of overaccumulation.28 From this perspective, ‘[w]hat accumulation by dispossession does it to release a set of assets (including labour power) at very low (and in some cases zero) cost. Overaccumulated capital can seize hold of such assets and immediately turn them to profitable use.’ Accordingly, ‘if capitalism has been experiencing a chronic difficulty of overaccumulation since 1973, then the neoliberal project of privatization makes a lot of sense

26 Harvey 2003, pp. 67, 144, 145.
27 Harvey 2003, p. 141.
as one way to solve the problem’. 29 Transferring public assets to the private sector at knock-down prices is a means of devaluing capital and thereby of increasing the rate of profit.

Harvey is correct to argue that accumulation through different kinds of politically enforced means cannot be relegated to some originary stage of capitalism’s formation but is a persisting feature of its development. Thinking in these terms is a welcome aid to understanding contemporary processes of privatisation, which, as Harvey notes, have become a major stimulus to contemporary movements of resistance to neoliberalism in countries as diverse as Bolivia and Ghana. Moreover, some version of the idea that neoliberalism and accumulation by dispossession are closely connected has come to be taken up quite widely by radical theorists. 30 But the very importance of the phenomenon demands that it is conceptualised with care.

The potential pitfalls are well brought out by an interesting article by Massimo de Angelis, where ‘enclosures’ – de Angelis’s preferred term for accumulation by dispossession – are understood as a ‘constituent element of capitalist relations and accumulation’. Enclosure, that is, the de novo separation of the direct producers from the means of production by means of extra-economic force, is a chronic feature of the capitalist mode of production because capital tends to expand to colonise the whole of life, while people inhabit life-worlds where they are able to construct alternatives to commodified social relations. Consequently, common to all enclosures is ‘the forcible separation of people from whatever access to social wealth they have which is not mediated by competitive markets and money as capital’. They are achieved by two means: (i) Enclosures as a conscious imposition of “power-over”. (ii) Enclosures as a by-product of the accumulation process.’ The first embraces political interventions ranging from the original seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Acts of Parliament enclosing common land from which the term ‘enclosure’ gains its currency to contemporary privatisations. De Angelis gives as examples of the second category ‘“negative externalities”, that is costs that are not included in the market price of a good, because the costs are incurred by social agents who are external to the producing form’ – for example, environmental pollution and the depletion of resources. 31

29 Harvey 2003, pp. 149–50.
30 For example, Perelman 2000 and Retort 2005.
31 De Angelis 2004, pp. 61, 75, 77, 78. The definition of enclosure given in the text summarises the discussion on pp. 62–8.
But negative externalities are not genuine cases of the forcible separation of the direct producers from the means of production by extra-economic means. De Angelis rightly points out that pollution and resource depletion may drive peasants off their land. This does not make them instances of enclosure, since what is responsible for their impoverishment is not the intervention of extra-economic force but the ‘normal’ workings of the accumulation process. This does not make what happens to the peasants any less unjust or worthy of condemnation and opposition: one of the main thrusts of *Capital*, Volume I, is to show that the paradigmatic injustice under capitalism, the exploitation of wage-labour, requires neither force nor fraud to function effectively. The analysis of primitive accumulation in Part 8 is not really concerned with Harvey’s main preoccupation – that capital can also expand itself through coercive forms of predation and plunder. Rather, it seeks to show how the presuppositions of capitalist exploitation – above all, the separation of the direct producers of the means of production – were established. This is indeed a process of forcible dispossession whose history ‘is written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire’. But this fiery and bloody history made it possible for exploitation to occur thanks to the ‘silent compulsion of economic relations. Direct extra-economic force is still of course used, but only in exceptional cases’.32 As both de Angelis and Harvey correctly observe, nothing in this analysis requires us to regard accumulation by dispossession as a once-and-for-all occurrence, as opposed to a chronic feature of the entire history of capitalism. But this does not diminish the significance of the distinction between capital accumulation based on the exploitation of wage-labour (what Harvey calls ‘expanded reproduction’) and ‘accumulation based on predation, fraud, and violence’.

In seeking, in violation of his own definition of enclosure, to collapse this crucial distinction, de Angelis effectively subsumes the entire capital-relation under enclosure: as he puts it, capital must be conceived ‘as enclosing social force’.33 Harvey, by contrast, refuses to take this step. He insists on the distinction between expanded reproduction and accumulation by dispossession, argues that ‘primitive accumulation that opens up a path to expanded reproduction’ has a progressive dimension, and stresses that ‘the two aspects of expanded reproduction and accumulation by dispossession are organically linked, dialectically intertwined’. He believes these conceptual points are

32 Marx 1976, pp. 875, 899.
33 De Angelis 2004, p. 59, n. 5.
important politically, since the Left must find ways of connecting up 'the struggles within the field of expanded reproduction' – most obviously, different forms of trade-union activism, which occupied centre-stage during the long boom of 1945–73 – with 'the struggles against accumulation through dispossession that the social movements coalescing with the anti- and alternative globalization movements are primarily focusing upon'.

All these points are ones with which we agree. Nevertheless, there are certain problems with the way in which Harvey conceptualises accumulation by dispossession. These concern, first, where he draws the concept's boundaries, secondly, how he understands the economic significance of the phenomenon to which it refers, and, finally, its actual extension within the contemporary world economy. To take the first problem, as we have seen, Harvey presents the greater weight of accumulation by dispossession in contemporary capitalism as one way of attenuating or ending the overaccumulation crisis by devaluing capital. As he goes on correctly to note: ‘The same goal can be achieved, however, by the devaluation of existing capital assets and labour power.’ This is precisely the mechanism that Marx identifies at work in economic crises, when capital assets can be bought up cheap, and higher unemployment forces workers to accept lower wages, and thus the rate of profit can return to a level permitting further accumulation. But, a page later, Harvey seems to associate this different form of devaluation with accumulation by dispossession:

Regional crises and highly localized place-based devaluations as a primary means by which capitalism perpetually creates its own 'other' to feed upon it. The financial crises of East and South-East Asia in 1997–8 were a classic case of this.

The only justification that we can find for this claim is an earlier suggestion that the unemployment created by labour-saving investments is a case of 'othering':

capitalism does indeed require something ‘outside of itself’ in order to accumulate, but in the last case [i.e. the creation of an industrial reserve army] it actually throws workers out of the system at one point in time in order to have them to hand for purposes of accumulation at a later point in time.

---

34 Harvey 2003, pp. 164, 176.
35 Harvey 2003, pp. 150, 151.
36 Harvey 2003, p. 141.
But in what sense are unemployed workers ‘out of the system’? They may not be directly employed by capital, but in advanced capitalist economies they will subsist thanks to welfare provision ultimately funded by the taxation of wages and profits (we return to this point below). Particularly in the global South, those excluded from wage-labour have to find means of subsistence in other ways but – despite de Angelis’s attempts to romanticise these survival strategies as the creation of ‘new commons’ – typically, they are still tied to the capitalist economy. \(^{37}\)

Secondly, not simply are the boundaries of accumulation by dispossession not clearly drawn, but its functions need more fine-grained analysis than Harvey offers. As we have seen, he presents it as one solution to the problem of overaccumulation. From this perspective, accumulation by dispossession seems like a variant of the general formula of capital – \(M\text{–}C\text{–}M’\) – only whereas, in the case of expanded reproduction, valorisation is secured by the exploitation of wage-labour, here it is achieved by ‘predation, fraud, and violence’. But it is worth considering more closely some of the economic forms through which this occurs today, particularly in respect of privatisation, which Harvey calls ‘The Cutting Edge of Accumulation by Dispossession’: ‘Assets held by the state or in common were released to the market where overaccumulating capital, could invest in them, upgrade them, and speculate in them.’\(^{38}\) In fact, privatisation takes different forms, in turn fulfilling a variety of functions. We suggest these can be usefully understood in terms of commodification, recommodification and restructuring.

This classification contrasts with that given by Harvey in *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, where he breaks down accumulation by dispossession into

1. Privatization and commodification;
2. Financialization;
3. The management and manipulation of crises; and
4. State redistributions.\(^{39}\)

This list illustrates how broadly Harvey casts the net of accumulation by dispossession, to the detriment of more precise analysis. The advantage of our own classification is that, first, it allows us better historically to

---

\(^{37}\) See Davis 2004 for a suggestive analysis of the growth of the urban ‘informal sector’ in the neoliberal era.

\(^{38}\) Harvey 2003, pp. 157, 158.

\(^{39}\) Harvey 2005b, pp. 160–5.
situate privatisations (hence the distinction between commodification and recommodification) and, secondly, it permits a more careful differentiation of their economic functions. We look at each briefly in turn.

(i) Commodification: here, assets that were not previously commodities become items of private property that may be bought, sold, and speculated in. When patents are taken out in basmati rice or in a gene, then what had once been public knowledge – in the one case embodied in traditional skills and understandings, in the other the result of modern scientific research – is transformed into a commodity. This is a very pure form of the kind of expropriation that Harvey has in mind: corporations use their resources and privileged access to the policy process and legal system to gain control of and make profits from what previously belonged either to no one or to the state. In many ways comparable to this is the sale of Bolivia’s natural gas reserves – 29 trillion cubic feet, valued at $250 billion – to foreign oil companies, among them BP, Repsol, and Petrobras, since the very existence of these reserves was not known till a few years ago.

(ii) Recommodification: here, what was once a commodity, or at least was produced in the private sphere, but which had been taken over by the state, is converted back into a commodity. Contemporary privatisations of public utilities such as water and electricity typically take this form. This is the fate that also hangs over the welfare state, though its socio-economic meaning must be analysed with care. Prior to the development of collective provision, the entire cost of reproduction of labour-power fell directly on the direct wage paid to the worker: this could be used to purchase health care, for example, as a commodity, or to support normally female family members who produced use-values such as cooking and cleaning within the household. Inasmuch as the welfare state partially replaced this privatised process of reproducing labour-power with services collectively provided on the basis of need rather than ability to pay, it represented a degree of ‘decommodification’ – taking a portion of need provision outside the scope of the market (although, of course, the household itself represents a domain governed by non-commodity relations).

The limitation thus imposed on the logic of the market, and the fact that it was frequently introduced under pressure from below explains the immense political investment made in the welfare state by the labour movement – for

40 Understanding welfare provision is an analytical minefield: see the critical survey of the literature in Fine 2002, Chapter 10.
example, the National Health Service in Britain, and the bitter resistance that attempts to reduce its scope tend to evoke. This does not, however, alter the fact that collective provision still reproduced labour-power in the form of the commodity wage-labour, providing capital with a relatively healthy and educated workforce and financed out of taxation that, as various studies have shown, fell largely on earnings. The extent of ‘decommodification’ should therefore not be exaggerated: it is typically closely interwoven with commodification. All the same, welfare provision is now sometimes simply being recommodified: this is, in effect, what has happened to dental services in Britain, since, as both the quantity and quality of NHS dentistry have declined, more and more patients have been driven into the private sector. But the changes currently underway to welfare provision in Britain at least are best analysed under our third heading.

(iii) Restructuring: the point here is to recognise the extent to which contemporary privatisations contribute to broader processes of capital restructuring. For example, the current wave of public-service ‘reforms’ in Britain typically involve growing reliance on private provision. Thus, in September 2003, foreign companies were awarded almost all the government contracts to provide 250,000 operations a year for NHS patients in privately-owned and managed treatment centres.41 Or again, state schools, rebranded as ‘city academies’, are run by private ‘sponsors’. In both cases, the service continues to be on the basis of need, and is largely or wholly funded out of general taxation. Cases such as these help to explain why the share of public expenditure in national income has changed so little in the advanced capitalist economies over the past generation, despite the neoliberal ‘counter-revolution’.42

Another instance of the same phenomenon of restructuring is provided by the privatisation of what used in Britain to be called the nationalised industries. British Steel and Telecom and Rail and the National Coal Board were organised as large capitalist enterprises, with managerial hierarchies, multi-branch structures, and workforces largely composed of subordinate wage-labourers, despite being publicly owned. Their financial autonomy from the Treasury varied; some competed in national and global markets (for example, the first and last corporations listed), others enjoyed national monopolies (that, in the case of telecommunications and rail in Britain, have still only partially been

---

41 Timmins 2004.
42 Figures for state expenditure can be found in Hay 2005, p. 246.
dismantled). Whatever has changed with such corporations’ privatisation, it is not that they have moved from being ‘outside’ capital to becoming part of it. They have moved from being state to private capitals. As such, this is a sideways move, from one form of capitalism to another, as with the collapse of the former USSR.

One main change consequent on this restructuring has concerned where the benefits fall within the capitalist class. Thus private provision within the NHS means that mainly foreign health companies obtain a new, major source of profits, while the established private health sector in Britain has come under pressure to cut costs in order to compete with them for these lucrative public contracts. Marxist political economists have often understood public enterprise as a means through which the costs of providing essential infrastructure are socialised and sometimes heavily subsidised by the state: one of the most spectacular examples is provided by the role of the US Bureau of Reclamations and the Army Corps of Engineers in undertaking the massive public irrigation works on which the cities of California and the Southwest rely for their water.

Privatisation allows private investors and the ex-state firms’ senior executives to realise the profits and sometimes the superprofits hitherto locked up in their products insofar as their prices were regulated to the benefit of the rest of the capitalist class – think, for example, of the gargantuan gains that technical change has brought the privatised and deregulated telecoms industry over the past decade or two (although, in the case of many utilities, the state continues to underwrite and even to subsidise private firms’ profits). Harvey writes of ‘a redistribution of assets that increasingly favoured the upper rather the lower classes’, but – although, undeniably, the costs have been borne by working people and the poor – privatisation has also involved a redistribution of surplus-value within the capitalist class. Thus the initial public offers of shares in privatised companies at subsidised prices certainly defrauded the (primarily working-class) taxpayer, but they also re-allocated profits within the ruling class – from the firms that had been able to purchase cheap inputs from the public sector to the privatised companies’ senior executives, the investment banks that organised the share launches, and the institutional investors that ended up owning most of the shares.

43 Timmins 2004.
44 Reisner 1986.
45 Harvey 2003, p. 159.
None of the foregoing in any sense diminishes the significance of accumulation by dispossession. It does, however, highlight the complexity of the processes involved, which cannot be seen as simply a means of devaluing capital, or the plunder of the commons, but, rather, as facets of the much larger scale re-organisation of capitalism over the past generation, which has involved a shift from the predominantly nationally-organised, and heavily state-directed capitalism that prevailed in the mid-twentieth century, to a form of capitalism that, though still, as Harvey emphasises, massively regionalised and interwoven with the nation-state, is nevertheless far more reliant on transnational production networks than in the past.46 This then relates to the third question we have about accumulation by dispossession, namely how important is it? Harvey’s own statements are cautious, but general: he says, as we have seen, that in the 1980s and 1990s ‘“accumulation by dispossession” . . . became much more central in global capitalism’, which does not tell us how central it now is.

The question is an important one, because some argue that accumulation by politically enforced means is becoming the dominant form of contemporary capitalism. Such is indeed the implication of de Angelis’s making enclosure constitutive of the capital-relation. Others make the claim more or less explicitly. Thus Vijay Prasad writes:

Enron and similar marauding firms seek to enter the oppressed regions of the world, cannibalize those sections of the economy held in the public’s trust and constrain weak states to guarantee them a high rate of return – all of this without putting a gun to the head of the regime. This is the Enron stage of capitalism.47

Talking about an ‘Enron stage of capitalism’ implies that capitalism today lives by this kind of predation on the global South. The belief that this is so is widely held on the radical Left today, particularly in the altermondialiste movement.

That something is widely believed does not make it true, of course. The sharply fluctuating inward flows of foreign direct investment (FDI) since the early 1990s, shown in Table 1, give an indication of where capital believes that the best returns can be made.48 FDI remains heavily concentrated in the

---

46 See, for example, Harman 1996.
48 Foreign direct investment includes cross-border mergers and acquisitions that do not create new productive capacity. The figures accordingly reflect the transnational
M&A craze at the height of the late 1990s boom-bubble, but this does not affect their value as evidence of corporate judgements about the relative profitability of investments in different regions.

49 It is true that portfolio investment in corporate equity and bonds, as opposed to FDI, has in recent years been flooding into so-called ‘emerging markets’: according to the Financial Times’ ‘emerging markets’ equities and bonds have hugely outperformed developed markets in recent years... Flows into emerging market equities are

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Developed countries</td>
<td>180.8</td>
<td>472.5</td>
<td>828.4</td>
<td>1,108.0</td>
<td>571.5</td>
<td>489.9</td>
<td>366.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Europe</td>
<td>100.8</td>
<td>263.0</td>
<td>500.0</td>
<td>697.4</td>
<td>368.8</td>
<td>380.2</td>
<td>310.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>60.3</td>
<td>174.4</td>
<td>283.4</td>
<td>314.0</td>
<td>159.5</td>
<td>62.9</td>
<td>29.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing economies</td>
<td>118.6</td>
<td>194.4</td>
<td>231.9</td>
<td>252.5</td>
<td>157.6</td>
<td>157.6</td>
<td>172.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South, East and South-East Asia*</td>
<td>69.6</td>
<td>92.1</td>
<td>109.1</td>
<td>142.7</td>
<td>102.2</td>
<td>86.3</td>
<td>96.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>32.8</td>
<td>45.5</td>
<td>40.3</td>
<td>40.7</td>
<td>46.9</td>
<td>52.7</td>
<td>53.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central and Eastern Europe</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>26.4</td>
<td>31.2</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World</td>
<td>310.9</td>
<td>690.9</td>
<td>1,086.8</td>
<td>1,388.0</td>
<td>817.6</td>
<td>678.8</td>
<td>559.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developed Countries as % of World</td>
<td>58.15</td>
<td>68.39</td>
<td>76.22</td>
<td>79.83</td>
<td>69.90</td>
<td>72.17</td>
<td>65.51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Excluding Japan: FDI inflows to South Asia varied between $2.5bn and $6.5bn in this period

Source: UNCTAD, World Investment Report 2004

advanced regions of the world economy – Western Europe, North America, and East Asia. It is interesting that the share of investment flows taken by the advanced countries actually increased during the huge surge in FDI at the end of the 1990s, which was fuelled by the Clinton boom in the US and the shift to the single currency in continental Europe. The same pattern has prevailed ever since the Second World War: the transnational corporations that dominate global capitalism tend to concentrate their investment (and trade) in the advanced economies – and indeed to a large extent in their own regions. Capital continues largely to shun the global South.49
The most important exception to this pattern is, of course, China, the recipient of a prodigious surge of foreign investment – though, even here, it is important to preserve a sense of proportion: in 2004, FDI inflows into China amounted to $55bn, significantly less than those into the US ($107bn) and the UK ($78.5bn). As Harvey notes, ‘the turn towards state-orchestrated capitalism in China has entailed wave after wave of primitive accumulation’. Not only have many state and township/village enterprises been privatised, but collectively owned land has been appropriated by local officials who sell it on for commercial development, sometimes provoking massive rural protests. But it is important, as Harvey himself encourages us in *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, to see this plunder and predation, cruel and unjust as it undeniably is, as contributors to a process of primitive accumulation in the classical sense that is helping to create the conditions for what he calls expanded reproduction – capital accumulation based on the exploitation of wage-labour – on a rapidly growing scale in China. What attracts foreign direct investment to China is not the opportunity to cannibalise collectively owned assets but the potential significantly to reduce costs of production in highly competitive world markets by participating in the transnational production networks that are centred on China. The enclosure of the commons underway there is helping to create the conditions of, rather than constituting the accumulation process in China.

These comments are in no way directed at Harvey, who, as we have seen, insists on the dialectical articulation of expanded reproduction and accumulation by dispossession. Moreover, he portrays the world economy, at record levels and emerging market bond prices are at all-time highs. But this development has to be kept in context. In the first place, it is likely largely to reflect a speculative movement comparable to the emerging markets boom of the early 1990s, which was punctured by the Mexican crisis of 1994–5 and the East-Asian and Russian crashes of 1997–8. Secondly, by historical standards, the inflow is relatively small: according to Richard Cookson of HSBC, ‘the average 19th century investor in Britain was likely to have had 25 percent of his money in emerging markets. By comparison, US institutional investors in recent years have had barely 10 percent invested in foreign securities, with a fraction of that devoted to emerging markets.’ The total value of emerging market debt traded in London re-attained its 1905 level of 12 per cent of global GDP only in 2005 (Brown-Humes 2006).

50 *Financial Times*, 24 June 2005. These figures, from the OECD, are not entirely comparable with those produced by UNCTAD that form the basis of Table 1.
52 Lee and Selden 2005.
53 Harvey 2005b, Chapter 5.
54 Hart-Landsberg and Burkett 2006.
not as the ‘smooth space’ of Empire but as a complex totality articulating together an agglomeration of unevenly distributed ‘regionalities built up through the molecular processes of capital accumulation in space and time’:

The generalized over-capacity that Brenner identifies particularly from 1980 onwards can in this way be disaggregated into a hegemonic economic hub (the triad of the United States, Japan, and Europe) and a cascading and proliferating series of spatial-temporal fixes primarily throughout East and South-East Asia but with additional elements within Latin America (Brazil, Mexico, and Chile in particular), supplemented since the end of the Cold War with a series of rapid thrusts into eastern Europe.55

Harvey does, however, sometimes err too far towards the idea of a shift towards a predominantly predatory capitalism. Thus he writes: ‘The US was [in the 1980s and 1990s] moving towards becoming a rentier economy in relation to the rest of the world and a service economy at home.’ He cites in support of Peter Gowan’s analysis of how the Wall Street-Treasury-IMF complex has used financial crises ‘to reorganize the internal social relations of production in each country where they occurred in such a way as to favour the further penetration of external capitals’, and it is in this context that he first refers to the greater contemporary salience of accumulation by dispossession.56 This is a large subject on which there is much more to say than we can here, so we will make just two points.

First, Harvey is right to stress the enormous competitive pressures under which the US economy has struggled particularly since the development of

---

55 Harvey 2003, p. 121. For Harvey, the spatio-temporal fix involves the displacement of a crisis of overaccumulation through long-term investments and/or gaining access to markets and productive resources elsewhere: Harvey 2003, pp. 108–24, and Harvey 1982, Chapters 12 and 13.

56 Harvey 2003, pp. 66, 67; see Gowan 1999. Harvey also writes: ‘An unholy alliance between state powers and the predatory aspects of finance capital forms a cutting edge of a “vulture capitalism” that is as much about cannibalistic practices and forced devaluations as it is about achieving harmonious global development’ (Harvey 2003, p. 136). He seems, however, to see this as a trend that could become predominant should neoliberalism cause even greater economic and social havoc than it is presently doing rather than as the constitutive feature of American imperialism today. Simon Bromley, in an article directed against Harvey and those who share his analysis of the origins of the Iraq War, argues the seizure of Iraq cannot be seen as arising from ‘an economically exclusive strategy, as part of a predatory form of hegemony. Rather, the United States has used its military power to fashion a geopolitical order that provides the political underpinning for its preferred model of the world economy: that is, an increasingly open liberal international order. US policy has aimed at creating a general, open international oil industry, in which markets, dominated by
large multinational firms, allocate capital and commodities. The power of the US state is deployed, not just to protect the particular interests of the United States consumption needs [sic] and US firms, but rather to create the general preconditions for a world oil market, confident in the expectation that, as the leading economy, it will be able to attain all its needs through trade’ (Bromley 2005, p. 254). We do not see any reason why Harvey should dissent from this argument (see his account of the historical strategy of American capitalism in Harvey 2003, Chapter 2), and we certainly have no problem in agreeing with it. Bromley is in effect treating oil as a case of what Andrew Bacevich calls the ‘strategy of openness’ that the US has pursued at least since the beginning of the twentieth century: ‘Central to this strategy is a commitment to global openness – removing barriers that inhibit the movement of goods, capital, ideas, and people. Its ultimate objective is the creation of an integrated international order based on the principles of democratic capitalism, with the United States as the ultimate guarantor of order and enforcer of norms’ (Bacevich 2002, p. 3). This is a good description of a hegemonic strategy, and one that is consistent with the frequent resort to military power by the US, as Bacevich amply demonstrates. The issue Bromley does not seriously address in his article is whether US hegemony is under strain, and, if it is, what kind of strategic responses are likely to be canvassed among the managers of the American state.

in the global South: the role of European transnationals in Latin American privatisations is particularly striking. But the predominant flows of commodities and of capital across the world economy take place among the OECD countries, and – along with the important extension of these circuits to embrace China – they feed the expanded reproduction of a capitalist system that continues to derive its profits mainly from the exploitation of wage-labour.

**Conclusion**

Marxist approaches to imperialism are a way into understanding the trajectory of global capitalism as a whole. It is one of the great strengths of *The New Imperialism* that Harvey understands this and therefore discusses much more than geopolitics or Iraq. His particular conceptualisation of imperialism is valuable both in itself and as a means of developing a Marxist theory of the state. Harvey has strengthened Arrighi’s distinction between territorial and capitalist logics of power by setting it firmly within a Marxist theory of overaccumulation and crisis. The distinction itself, we believe, can be better secured by restating it in terms of the kind of analysis of the different but converging interests of capitalists and state managers that has been developed by Block, Harman, and others. Our main difference with Harvey, namely his overextension of the valuable concept of accumulation by dispossession, is politically important because of the way in which it dovetails in with a critique of neoliberalism common in the *altermondialiste* movement. But this does not diminish the extent of our theoretical agreement with, indeed debt to him.

**References**


— But see Erica Schoenberger’s suggestive case study of Vivendi Environnement’s emergence at the beginning of the 2000s as ‘the largest provider of water and wastewater treatment infrastructure, products and services in the world’. She notes that, ‘despite the attention focused on privatization and growth in emerging markets . . ., especially in Asia, developing countries as a whole have not been a major investment target for Vivendi.’ On a relatively generous calculation, the share of developing countries in Vivendi’s total revenues rose from 4 percent in 1998 to 8.7 percent in 2000. By contrast, ‘the overwhelming focus of the firm’s global repositioning is the US’ (Schoenberger 2003, pp. 86, 91, 92).
Harvey, David 2005b, A Brief History of Neoliberalism, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Ben Fine

Debating the ‘New’ Imperialism

I. Introduction

David Harvey is one of the most prominent Marxists with two other rare attributes. First, he has made major contributions to, and is well-versed in, Marxist political economy, in contrast, paradoxically, to many others who adopt the mantle of Marxism. In addition, he is, and has long been, a prominent figure within his designated discipline of geography, commanding influence and respect far beyond the confines of a Marxist cabal. Given the dearth of major studies within (academic) Marxism addressing the systemic nature of contemporary capitalism, his recent contribution on The New Imperialism is a major event. The purpose of the assessment here is to set this work in a broader context than its immediate subject matter in two ways although many of the issues covered are raised explicitly by Harvey himself. First is to address issues of methodology, method and value theory. How are the relationships between the inner laws of capitalism and their outward manifestation to be investigated and elaborated? Second is to locate Harvey’s contribution in more general developments across the social sciences. In
what way does Harvey both reflect and contribute to the intellectual milieu at the turn of the millennium?

Most immediately, as a number of commentators have observed, recent events on the world stage have inspired a renewal of interest in the notion of imperialism (and empire). Ideological assaults from the Right in these terms have been noticed and are significant for their brutal honesty in the new international environment marked by the end of the Cold War and the drive to neoliberalism. But these are readily exaggerated relative to the more palatable rationale provided by the idea of war against terrorism and in promotion of human rights and democracy. For the Left, there has been a return to, and a reconstruction or rejection of the classical notion of imperialism derived from Lenin. This has itself built upon the rich and wide-ranging literature around globalisation that has been so prominent, and original, since the early 1990s (and not before).

Whilst the turn to imperialism remains novel, it is still surprisingly unsettled and unsettling. There are good reasons for this. Even a selection from the issues raised includes the following. What is an appropriate political economy for contemporary capitalism; is imperialism to be understood as a stage of capitalism and/or as historically and/or politically specific; what is the relationship between contemporary capitalism/imperialism and earlier periods; what is the relationship between economic and other forms of power, especially the political, ideological, cultural and military; is US power on the decline; what is the significance of the rise of China in particular and the shifting balance of economic activity more generally?

Such questions, sometimes individually and certainly collectively, straddle the methodological, the theoretical the empirical, the comparative and the historical. There is a corresponding danger of offering quick analytical fixes – over-ambitious, premature and/or simple judgements. The nature of (US) hegemony, for example, is multi-dimensional and, whilst not independent of one another, its separate elements do not necessarily conform to one another. Does heightened military aggression reflect the weakening of, or compensation for, declining economic weight? Either way, what is the time-scale involved in the shifting patterns of power – dramatic as in the collapse of the Soviet bloc, or more attenuated? And are we in a position to predict the future patterns of capital accumulation other than in extrapolating current, relatively abbreviated trends, particularly bearing in mind the unforeseen and unforeseeable? In placing China in perspective, it is worth recalling the
economic challenges that have previously been anticipated as deriving from German (or EU), Japanese, and East-Asian capital, let alone the Soviet challenge. Possibly, it is necessary to accept that some of the issues raised previously, and others, are not amenable to certain and easy answers, especially where the balance and significance of US economic and political power are concerned.

These analytical conundrums are complemented by those concerning the nature and style of both investigation and presentation. There is a need to bridge the abstract and the concrete – from the laws of capitalism to the significance of the Gulf Wars. And, equally, there is the issue of the discovery and choice of language and concepts that potentially capture the complexity and spirit of our age without unduly compromising on analytical principles. Account must also be taken of audience. Is it one versed in the finer points of value theory and/or other aspects of what has become an increasingly and exclusively academicised Marxism? Or is it a matter of galvanising an anti-imperialist ideology and political activism for which depth and sophistication of analysis are rendered luxurious if not redundant?

It is against such preliminaries that I assess David Harvey’s *The New Imperialism*. It is perhaps readily situated by way of metaphor, as an exercise in white-water canoeing. Harvey steers us through the rapids. The important point is to have made some progress, although the bubbling and uncharted waters continue to stretch ahead of us. Lessons can be learnt from the experience even if future obstacles will not be entirely replicated. In addition, Harvey’s contribution draws upon a deep reservoir of other work whose presence and significance is not always overt. It makes sense not only to track his current journey but also how he has come to make it.\(^1\) Harvey’s work, however, is so extensive and wide-ranging that attention will be focused primarily upon his political economy. And the reader will, I hope, excuse undue reference to my own work as I seek a perspective on *The New Imperialism* by seeking to place myself at the analytical helm.

**The inner limits of Harvey’s *Capital***

Although by no means confined to it, Harvey’s contribution to Marxist political economy is heavily centred on what is to be found in his *Limits to Capital*.\(^2\)

---

\(^1\) The first version of this paper offered an appreciation of Harvey’s political economy but it has been rewritten and extended to focus more specifically on his *The New Imperialism*. Harvey 2003a.

\(^2\) Harvey 1982.
The volume has been reprinted without amendment after twenty years, and he has also chosen not to respond in substance to the wide-ranging, some penetrating, *Antipode* commentaries that the anniversary prompted. In short, and especially in one respect, *Limits* can be taken as representative of his continuing stance on political economy. Its most important feature, one almost taken for granted without comment in offering a reading of *Capital*, is that the capitalist economy as such is an essential object of abstract study. The production, circulation, distribution and accumulation of (surplus-) value is subject to structures, processes, conflicts and laws that are identifiable in and of themselves.

Second, though, adopting such a posture is not to descend into economic determinism, even for the economy. Harvey’s reading of *Capital* remains dialectical and the presence of this method is revealed through his own notion and use of internal and external contradiction. Capital lies at the heart of the internal contradictions of the capitalist mode of production, and its categories can be analytically unfolded. For example, money is the fetishised form in which social (and other) relations of all sorts are more or less directly represented. Indeed, money can become a fetishised form of itself, as in fictitious capital, paper entitlements to surplus-value that apparently circulate in their own right independently, to a greater or lesser extent, of the production of surplus-value on which they collectively depend.

But between money as the fetishised form of the social relations of production underpinning the value of commodities (the opening of Volume I of *Capital*) and the emergence of interest-bearing and fictitious capital (deep in the heart of Volume III), a world of internal contradictions needs to be filled out. First and foremost is the accumulation of capital, as a system of production of absolute and relative surplus-value. This gives rise to the more complex forms taken by (surplus-) value, as in the transformation of (surplus-) value into prices of production (profit), the circulation of fixed capital, the composition of capital (as technical, value and organic) and the role of landed property and rent. The system of accumulation is beset by crises as elaborated by Marx in the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall (LTRPF) and counteracting tendencies. Further, immediately rooted in, but extending

---

4 Harvey 1982, p. xv and especially Harvey 1996.
5 See Fine and Saad-Filho 2003 for an overview of Marx’s *Capital* and its relevance to contemporary capitalism, and Fine and Harris 1979 for a review of positions, albeit dated and heavily marked in style by the Althusserianism in vogue at the time.
beyond, such internal contradictions are accompanying processes such as (de- and re-) commodification, urbanisation, proletarianisation, and globalisation.

This is a desperately brief listing of some of the elements that constitute the subject matter of Harvey’s internal contradictions. Investigatively, causally and expositionally, they have informed the vast bulk of his work even where its immediate focus is removed from the economic as such and its readers (and critics) fail to recognise or deplore its continuing presence. But it would be a mistake to confine the notion of the internal to the economic. In his most recent work on the ‘new’ imperialism, for example, Harvey has a short subsection entitled ‘Inner Contradictions’, in which the subject matter is the political opposition of entrenched capitalist classes to reforms that might allow a renewal of accumulation. More generally, imperialism is about the exercise of cumulative political power as a reflection of the accumulation of capital. For such reasons, Harvey provocatively prefers Arendt’s political to Lenin’s economic imperialism.

It is not clear that a choice is necessary, given Lenin’s idea that the predominance of inter-imperialist rivalry over co-operation leads to war, and that this is associated with working-class compliance through nationalist and other related ideologies. There does not seem to be a dispute over whether capitalism is subject to economic laws, and that these are attached to different stages of development. These, in turn, both constrain the political forms that can be adopted and give rise to historically specific outcomes. By the same token, whatever its considerable merits, Lenin’s account needs to be updated (methodologically, expositionally as a pamphlet, and as contemporary case study). The internationalisation of capital has been extended from commodity and money capital to include productive capital (as in multinational enterprises). Despite the ideology of neoliberalism, the economic role of the state has been extended throughout most of the twentieth century and remains paramount. And US hegemony has prevailed through and beyond the Cold War, reflecting the predominance of inter-imperialist co-operation over rivalry. No doubt the switch from the predominance of rivalry to co-operation renders assessment of the contemporary scene more difficult. Inter-imperialist wars brutally clarify, whereas co-operation, even reluctant complicity, muddies the water.

---

6 Even more briefly Harvey 2001, p. 79: ‘Within the framework of capitalism I hang my interpretation . . . on the twin themes of accumulation and class struggle’.
7 Harvey 2003a.
The point, then, is to push the abstract analysis of capitalism and its stages of development to its limits with an eye to incorporating historically specific outcomes. Two errors of judgement are possible. One is not to push the internal contradictions far enough and the other is to push them too far. But, in this respect, it may be futile to seek to push out the boat towards a clear delineation between the abstract and the concrete, the stages of development and their manifestations, and the economic and the political. After all, when we talk about imperialism today, it is impossible to do so without a more or less conscious acknowledgement of the United States (or Fordism, with its US overtones, as Gramsci would have it) however much it may be addressed in the abstract language of hegemony, militarism, and so on.

All of this is to have raised, however indirectly, two issues of method. One is the scope, nature and direction of the internal contradictions, value analysis for example: where do they end and the external begin? And the other is how to move between the internal and the external. The first question, at least in principle, is easier to answer than the second. Elaboration of the internal contradictions of capitalism in general must remain within limits imposed by the material world being reproduced in thought. After a point, they can only be extended by dialogue with, and the incorporation of, more socially and historically specific material.9 There are limits to how far we can go with capital and value as abstract categories; after which, such categories need to be concretely and historically charged – but with what? – on which more discussion later.

There is reason to suspect that, at times, Harvey’s contradictions are not always as dialectical as they might be. For internal contradictions, at the economic level, Harvey presents the three volumes of Capital as successive models rather than as the reproduction in thought of simple categories at more concrete and complex levels (and different ‘cuts’ are taken at crisis points,10 with occasional references elsewhere to equilibrium).11 This means that the unity of his treatment is flawed, the most important consequence being the inability to resolve apparent confusions around the various definitions and meanings of the compositions of capital.12 More specifically, Harvey’s distinction between enterprise and social-technological change is not apposite,

---

9 Rosdolsky 1977.
10 Harvey 1982.
11 Harvey 1982, p. 176, for example.
12 Harvey 1982, pp. 125–33 and Saad-Filho for a review and clarification.
as this has nothing to do as such with the differences between technical, organic and value compositions of capital. The organic composition of capital represents productivity increase through technical change within production alone, whereas the value composition reflects its effects through circulation as accumulation proceeds. As a result, Harvey’s dismissive stances on the transformation problem (which is not a theory of price due to differences in composition but how capital is devalued differentially through productivity increase) and unproductive labour float free from his otherwise excellent treatment of the LTRPF as crystallising the contradictions of capital accumulation.\textsuperscript{13}

Here, then, the passing reference to the LTRPF\textsuperscript{14} is made as if there is familiarity with its meaning, and the controversy that surrounds it and its validity. This can only be so for a limited number of his readers. It is worth explicitly distancing the interpretation of the law from a mechanical and empirical proposition that accumulation leads profitability to fall, giving rise to a crisis. On the contrary, the law is concerned with the interaction of underlying contradictory forces as accumulation proceeds that can, from time to time, only resolve themselves through crisis. But this is only one concrete, if acute, form of resolution of the law, for it continues to operate during periods of rapid, or more muted, phases of accumulation. This is true of the period following the collapse of the postwar boom, at least a thirty-year period that can hardly be designated a crisis without totally devaluing the meaning of the term.

In developing internal contradictions (of value theory), there is also a particularly surprising neglect, for a geographer, of Marx’s theory of (absolute) rent in which, significantly, the composition of capital figures strongly. For Marx, the particular form and content taken by landed property has a more-or-less favourable impact upon the accumulation of capital both as potential promoter of, and barrier to, access of capital to the land.\textsuperscript{15} Consequently, Marx’s interminable numerical examples in Volume III of \textit{Capital} are concerned to address how landed property can intervene in the process of accumulation (rather than as a monopoly or differential rent depending on market or ‘natural’ powers, respectively). In other words, to coin a phrase – more on which later

\textsuperscript{13} See especially summary in Harvey 1982, p. 189 and the continuing emphasis in his latest work on the capacity to sustain accumulation (Harvey 2003a).
\textsuperscript{14} Harvey 2003a.
\textsuperscript{15} See Fine 1979 for Marx’s theory of landed property (and rent) and Fine 1990 and 1994 for applications of the theory.
also – Marx seeks to ‘fix’ capital and space in terms of the relative power of their respective representative agents, as competitively accumulated capital flows differentially on and off the land.

In this respect, the Gulf Wars, and more, are about securing property rights to a highly land-dependent condition of production. The level and intensity of accumulation, differential profitability, how much and who appropriates it, are all involved. This is not to reduce the non-economic to the economic but to emphasise that conditions of accumulation are intimately and inextricably attached to the non-economic. As a consequence, securing property rights in the broadest sense, takes precedence even over (immediate) profitability. How otherwise can we explain the destructive effect of war on capital and profitability? Moreover, the means (and meanings) and mechanisms for securing property rights are necessarily distinct from the immediate accumulation of capital itself. In other words, the nature of property relations are reproduced, or transformed, during the course of capital accumulation by economic as well as by non-economic mechanisms. A parallel with the labour process, work organisation and the conditions surrounding the buying and selling of labour-power is illustrative. The accumulation of capital and production and appropriation of (absolute and relative) surplus-value necessarily entail the conflictual economic and social restructuring of ‘labour and industrial relations’. This is in the widest sense, from legislation to protect or to constrain the workforce through to the formation of, and struggles over, the welfare state. By the same token, land-intensive accumulation of capital requires, but does not pre-determine, the nature and content of access to property rights.

**The outer limits of Harvey’s *Capital***

To anticipate, this is important to bear in mind when situating Harvey’s notion of spatial fix. Otherwise, this commentary might so far be perceived to be predominantly relatively minor skirmishes over the internal contradictions posed by value analysis and, at most, a beginning in seeking to straddle analytically the divide between the internal contradictions and their external realisation in more complex or concrete forms. For central to Harvey’s work in this respect have been the notions of ‘cut’ for (economic) crisis, and ‘fix’ for time and space. Both of these terms are metaphorically and dialectically...

---

rich – joined but separate, solid but temporary, settled but unresolved, and so on. At one level, that of method, the dialectics are far from satisfactory. For they involve the import, as external contradictions, of totally ahistorical and asocial, or universal and general, concepts that do not concretise the previously developed internal contradictions. Rather, they are simply simultaneous and have no immediate connection to the political economy of capitalism as such. Time and space, for example, are universal categories without social and historical specificity. But value analysis has already moved beyond this general stage of analysis being specific to commodity production, and necessarily so in confronting the capitalist mode of production. Further, there are any number of cuts and fixes that might be made over and above, or alongside, time and space, those attached to gender, race, ethnicity, nature and the environment, and so on. Why privilege space and time, and how do they relate to other fixes or cuts?

At another level, as a corollary of universality, Harvey’s cuts and fixes as such do not incorporate the historically specific in moving from the abstract to the more concrete. In this respect, his more direct attempts at doing so have not always been judicious. This is true of his partial acceptance of regulation theory, of the significance of flexible specialisation, and the unacceptably reductionist attempt to attach them to the emergence of postmodernism.17

Admittedly, these stances are commendably mooted, if not absent, in later work. More substantive is his conversion to the cause of globalisation.18 Previously, it was seen as a conceptual weapon in the armoury of neoliberalism – the market is and should be sweeping away the nation-state. The subsequent literature has, however, proven a reaction against the initial understanding of globalisation, derived from a neoliberal impetus, in which the state is welcomed as withering away under the forces of world economy, and Harvey has now attached himself to this reaction against neoliberalism. He has emphasised, like others such as Giddens,19 the compression of time and space.20

---

17 See Harvey 1989 and 1990. For a more tempered view see Harvey 1985b, p. 121: ‘There is a general myth . . . that large-scale industry drives out small because of the superior efficiency achieved through economies of scale. . . . There is another myth, harder to dispel, that small industry and production by artisans is less innovative when it comes to new products or new labour processes.’ And, on this issue, see Fine 2002a, Chapter 5, especially where drawing upon the work of Phil Scranton.
19 Giddens 1999.
This is problematic over and above the previously observed universality attached to these categories in confronting the specifics of (contemporary) capitalism. For, as Harvey eloquently observes, time and time again, dialectics involves interactive tendencies and counteracting tendencies (although these should not be chosen arbitrarily, not least as empirical trends, and posed against one another). Accordingly, in these terms, the compression of time is the expansion of space and vice-versa. This is not to deny that the compression of time and space are systemic products of capitalism, as each is ‘used’ more intensively with growing productivity. But, as the interaction between time and space is not arithmetical, it is not subject to simple net effects. It is contradictory but in highly specific ways that reflect differentiated complexities (some compressing and some expanding), and none defined by a time/space continuum independent of the historically-specific development of capitalism. Even in purely arithmetical terms, increasing density of activity and speed across it leaves everything much as before – just as IT expands both speed and mass of data processed. If we take Harvey’s successive maps of Baltimore,21 one looks pretty much like the one before, only on a different scale!

Further, in positing a duality between a logic of value and a logic of territory, Harvey would appear to have jumbled up his dialectic (rather than turning it upside down or inside-out). For he suggests that, ‘at any given historical-geographical moment, one or other of the logics may dominate’.22 This is problematic. For how can a conceptually universal logic (of territory) dominate over a historically-specific one, of capital (which must surely always dominate if in place, albeit with a territorial element that may come to the fore)? Are they similar logics as such, and if not, as is surely the case, how can one be counterposed to another? In short, the logic of territory must be the logic of capitalist territory, and not an antithesis to the logic of capital.

This account is possibly unduly harsh in two senses. First, cuts, fixes, and other universal categories could be interpreted as an overt display of Harvey’s method of investigation, examining how capitalism restructures the universal through the use of these specific concepts. Second, this does, in his work, interplay with his method of presentation and the more historically specific unfolding of his empirical analyses. Significantly, his most recent work, concerned with the ‘new’ imperialism, marks a compelling fix of the categories of political economy to contemporary capitalism. It does so under the rubric

21 Harvey 2000, p. 47.
22 Harvey 2000, p. 33.
of overaccumulation in a way that might be best understood as a generalisation of Luxemburg’s theory of underconsumption. Essentially, her focus was on the need for more capitalist markets and how these might be provided, indeed were required in her view, by incorporation of non-capitalist formations with inevitably limited scope. Harvey understands the expansion of capital across all of its economic, political and ideological aspects, with its internal imperatives equally seeking external safety valves in what he terms, as a generalisation of primitive accumulation, the accumulation of dispossession.

From this perspective, Harvey’s account is rich and expansive, both theoretically and empirically. But it is also problematic. My own preference is to use primitive accumulation in the precise and narrow sense suggested by Marx. This is not the appropriation of assets from whatever source (especially abstinence by entrepreneurs) but the forcible expropriation of land from the peasantry, and their transformation into a waged labour force. This has to be accompanied by access to land, markets on which to buy and sell, and finance to purchase constant and variable capital. But the primitive act is to create wage-labour where previously it was absent. In this respect, the most remarkable developments over the past century have been, firstly, in the Soviet Union and, secondly, in China. Primitive accumulation in the former has been followed by an overt collapse of, and departure from, ‘socialism’. In China, primitive accumulation is now proceeding apace in what is all too readily recognisable as a dash towards capitalism.

Harvey’s shift from primitive accumulation to accumulation by dispossession goes much further than a change in terminology in two major, and questionable, respects. First is the extraordinarily wide definition that he deploys. It ranges over the privatisation of housing, through Soviet shock therapy, to all forms of privatisation, quite apart from the territorial fixes on the global stage. This is surely to homogenise what are diverse and complex moments in the economic restructuring of capital and the broader social restructuring of capitalism. This is all evidence of confusion over the relationship between the internal and external, not least as well-defined value analysis is abandoned. The circuits of capital, for example, are extended to ‘secondary’ and ‘tertiary’ levels to provide temporal fixes in the form of economic and social infrastructure broadly conceived. These are not, however, forms of capital nor part of its circuit. At most, they are unproductive expenditure, even if conducive to accumulation. They are not separate from, but nor are they governed directly

23 But see Harvey 2004.
by, the law of value. Significantly in earlier work, the forced but understandable desire to move from internal to external contradictions is also evident in Harvey’s idea of the built environment as a complex commodity.24 It is not, and suggesting so represents an illegitimate extrapolation from the commodity to the environment. A vast array of capitalist and non-capitalist commodity production and consumption (and commodity forms from bribery to charging for services but not for profit) and other activities are brought together in the built environment and, as such, it cannot be understood as a simple nor as a complex commodity – as is evident from the earlier case studies provided by Harvey on his beloved Baltimore and the Basilica of the Sacred Heart for example!25

Second, not least perhaps because of its expansive scope, Harvey exaggerates the significance of accumulation by dispossession. He asks, ‘how, when, and why does accumulation by dispossession emerge from this background state to become the dominant form of accumulation relative to expanded reproduction?’26 How has he come to this position? His deliberate and explicit reliance upon Rosa Luxemburg is telling. As is well-known, she fell foul of the error of underconsumption in presuming that capitalist reproduction depends upon external markets provided by non-capitalist formations whose incorporation undermines that role. As is evident from Marx’s schemata for economic reproduction, capitalism is capable of expanding value relations without resort to external markets provided by non-capitalist formations whose incorporation undermines that role. As is evident from Marx’s schemata for economic reproduction, capitalism is capable of expanding value relations without resort to external markets. Harvey accepts this but seems to displace and widen the scope of the underconsumptionist argument. He does so by appeal to the notion of overaccumulation and/or surplus capital (as opposed to relying exclusively on a surplus of commodities to be sold). As he puts it, ‘The capitalistic (as opposed to territorial) logic of imperialism has, I argue, to be understood against this background of seeking out “spatio-temporal fixes” to the capital surplus problem’.27 Whether for markets, territory or whatever, capital is perceived to have become incapable of reproducing itself other than through externally-sourced dispossession. As already indicated in the context of land and labour, it is essential that external relations are restructured. But

25 For the latter see especially Harvey 2003b. No less acceptable is the notion drawn from Bourdieu of (collective) symbolic capital, Harvey 2001, pp. 404–5; Fine 2001a, Chapter 4, for a critique.
26 Harvey 2003a, p. 153.
27 Harvey 2003a, p. 89.
this is different from these being either dominant or prerequisites in accumulation.

Thus, emphasis on modern forms of primitive accumulation is salient but exaggerated as a condition for renewal of sustained accumulation. It certainly is an inevitable consequence of accumulation as shifting property relations are necessary for it to be sustained in particular forms (how did our oil get under their soil?). But it is worth recalling that decolonisation accompanied the postwar boom. The latter was already at an end before the oil crises of the 1970s. The boom itself was also sustained by the opposite of the factors that Harvey now takes to be instrumental in current accumulation, not least the extension of nationalised industries and the economic role of the state more generally. Thus, Luxemburg is wrong, even when generalised from unidimensional underconsumption to multidimensional overaccumulation.

In short, it seems as if an unduly diverse set of factors is being collected under the umbrella of accumulation by dispossession. This has also resulted in the conflation of the analytical categories associated with value theory. In this respect, a different explanation can be offered for the slowdown in capital accumulation over the past thirty years and why it should appear to have resulted in a dependence on accumulation by dispossession rather than this being a consequence. For, despite its considerable presence in Harvey’s account, even more emphasis for the current period should be placed on the hegemonic role of finance within the developed world. The wedge that it has driven between real and fictitious accumulation is extraordinary, and the corresponding flows of value and surplus-value are increasingly felt in the detailed aspects of our lives. These range from the structuring of our cities to the provision of our health, education and welfare, let alone the more mundane economic aspects of providing funds for investment, growth and employment, whether to dispossess or otherwise. The troika of space, time and fixed capital worship as never before at the altar of finance.

This is not simply nor primarily a matter of the greater distributional share of a falling surplus finding itself in the hands of finance at the expense of accumulation (or wages and welfare). Marx’s theory of money (capital) divides it into two sorts – that which merely promotes sale and purchase and that which promotes accumulation and the production of surplus-value. One redistributes value; the other is a lever in creating surplus-value. At an individual level, money can be designated for these purposes as in credit or a loan advanced either to make consumer purchases or to build or extend a
factory. But, systemically, each of these intentions can be subverted. The consumer loan can be spent against commodity capital, thereby potentially funding further accumulation, as if a loan had been made for that purpose. And the business loan may fail and merely serve to circulate rather than expand (surplus-) value.

In other words, whether finance serves to promote real accumulation or not is not predetermined by the financial system itself but in its relationship with productive (and other forms of) capital. What has been remarkable over the past thirty years, however, is the extent to which the growing scale and diversity of financial markets has increasingly removed them from the real accumulation of capital. This is not simply the appropriation of surplus by finance that might otherwise be accumulated as productive capital. The economic and social restructuring of capital in all its aspects has become subject to the diverse logics of finance that have become variously known as neoliberalism and globalisation. Whilst these logics continue to depend upon and, to some extent, to facilitate the accumulation of surplus-value, its active promotion is tempered by fictitious accumulation of assets and the lesser and constrained role of the state that marked the postwar boom. It is precisely because finance is profitably inventing and expanding markets without the intervention of production that the phenomena that Harvey has dubbed accumulation by dispossession have flourished – not, it should be added, as a precondition for accumulation to be sustained but as a consequence of its lack of dynamism. This is so in case of privatisation, that does promote the private accumulation of capital and its financial counterparts but is far from conducive to systemic accumulation, as is most evident, for example, from its experience in accelerating UK’s de-industrialisation across vast swathes of what were its public and related sectors.

Is it possible, though, that through self- or state regulation that the financial system could be checked in its levels and composition of activity to what is warranted by the capacity to produce surplus-value? In part, the answer is in the negative because it cannot be anticipated how much surplus-value will be created. In addition, both within the financial sector itself and in its allocating finance to other capitals, the capacity to compete depends upon freedom from regulation and restriction. The financial sector competes to appropriate surplus-value without the capacity to guarantee its creation. This gives rise to a diversity of financial systems, derivatives, regulations, networks, cultures and contingent responses, both within financial systems and between them
and other capitals and governments. These have an effect, as in the current strength of finance and its impact on real accumulation, but the underlying contradiction between the two roles of finance in circulating commodities and creating more of them (and fictitious representations of both as in futures markets, shares, etc.) cannot be abolished through the forms that they adopt.

In other words, financial cuts, logics and fixes are paramount in the contemporary world. Within orthodox economics, they are broadly perceived in terms of a conflict between Keynesianism and monetarism, and greater or lesser reliance upon market forces more generally. Even within the more interventionist Keynesian approach, the perspective on the relations between and within the spheres of production and circulation remains limited. The capacity both to win economic policy to interventionism and for it to be effective is severely constrained. Yet it remains an attractive, and progressive, strategic option in highlighting the poverty of contemporary capitalism across its many aspects and in mobilising support for more fundamental and wide-ranging change. By the same token, issues associated with the new social movements are more secure and effective to the extent that they are broadened in scope and alliance. It is inconceivable that they can succeed in their own aims, let alone more widely, unless they incorporate and transform the traditional economic and political representation of the working class.

**Harvey within Marxist political economy**

With the appearance of *The New Imperialism*, it is not hard to see why Harvey views *Limits* as his favourite, albeit most difficult and least-read book. It was ten years in the making and it resulted from experience of years of *Capital* reading groups that themselves marked a shift in participants from activists to academic eccentrics. A useful entry point for assessing him within Marxist political economy more generally is by reference to his own assessment that *Limits* has been ignored by ‘Marxist economists’, something to be explained by conformity to interdisciplinary boundaries.

This entirely misrepresents the situation. Harvey’s political economy is greatly admired by Marxist economists, although this is not reflected in the literature for a number of reasons. First, *Limits* appeared as Marxist economics

---

28 Harvey 2004, p. 83.
was entering a period of free-fall, especially as far as it is attached to economics as an academic discipline. The rise of radical political economy from the late 1960s was reversed with a vengeance, and mainstream economics as a discipline has become uniquely and absolutely intolerant of heterodoxy of any sort. Thus, if Harvey’s political economy has been ignored, it has not been by a self-serving cabal of Marxist economists, for Marxist economics has only survived outside of the economics discipline itself. Its dwindling numbers of adherents have only debated to a limited extent with one another, in contrast to the lively period prior to *Limits*. Where Marxist economics has survived it has increasingly aped the mainstream or become idiosyncratic. Harvey could hardly have expected, or wanted, to be engaged with analytical Marxism, for example, to which he offers commendable short shrift.\(^\text{31}\)

Second, *Limits* is a very difficult book and not an introduction or alternative to *Capital*. To appreciate it fully, possibly at all, is to have read *Capital* and to have worked out a position on key concepts and propositions. Third, then, Harvey is liable only to have attracted both sympathetic and informed readers (and writers) with at most marginal disagreements with him, hardly conducive to commentary. Fourth, turning the tables, as Castree has argued more generally of Harvey’s Marxism, he has not engaged with others to promote, advance or clarify his position (and, otherwise, at most tends to be constructive and positive around the contributions of others despite disagreements).\(^\text{32}\) Last, from the perspective of Marxist political economy, Harvey is an irksome creature. Whilst clearly a fundamentalist of sorts (Marx is basically correct), he straddles the different schools of ‘fundamentalist’ thought. Thus, he is committed to dialectics but adjudges Marx to be mistaken in the transformation problem,\(^\text{33}\) and he denigrates esoteric discussion of unproductive labour.\(^\text{34}\) Yet he, correctly emphasises (if not sufficiently) the role of finance in contemporary capitalism, even though this is the dominant form of unproductive labour in the private sector (and quite apart from its significance for state employment).

In short, (Marxist) economics has not been like (Marxist) geography. It has effectively been excised from the discipline and, far from flourishing, is scarcely open to insiders let alone outsiders. Nor will I dwell upon the anomalies in Harvey’s polecon. Rather, I cannot emphasise too much that it depends upon

\(^{31}\) Harvey 1999, p. xxi.  
\(^{32}\) Castree 1996, p. 344.  
\(^{33}\) Harvey 1982, p. 4.  
\(^{34}\) Harvey 1982, p. 105.
an understanding of *Capital* and capital(ism), grounded in meticulous scholarship and, as such, should be contrasted with the misunderstandings, so rife in the literature, due to prejudice, invention or some academic form of Chinese whispers.\(^{35}\)

Yet, despite the more positive, if shifting, position of Marxism within geography, in which Harvey has been particularly prominent and influential, it has not been plain sailing. Indeed, for a large part of the discipline, it seems to be a matter of how to avoid the compelling logic of Marxist political economy in addressing the economic, social and cultural reconstruction of space. Postmodernism, poststructuralism, actor-network theory and the like, have all been adopted alongside lingering if discredited orthodoxies to skirt around Marxist political economy. There is the immanent danger of ‘ismitis’, of the Marxist geographer being accused of a variety of . . . isms, reductionism, economism, determinism, etc, as in the falling foul of the ANT (actor-network theory) police for driving a wedge between the ‘economic’ and the ‘non-economic’, whether the latter be the cultural, the built environment, space, environment, justice or whatever.\(^{36}\) One of Harvey’s many virtues resides in his refusal to confine polecon to a fixed terrain; another is never to lose grip of that terrain in engaging pastures new. Significantly, his account of his own work displays a splendid dialectic of being forced back from the geographical in all of its aspects to polecon prior to renewed forward movement.\(^{37}\)

As is apparent, one but not the only way in which Harvey has done this is to counterpose different logics, cuts and fixes in unfolding internal contradictions and embracing the external. Implicit in what has been argued earlier, it is not obvious that this method is entirely satisfactory in constructing the ‘new’ imperialism. It appears to lose grasp of the value logic with which it begins and not necessarily to append the most appropriate fixes in light of contemporary conditions. One reason for this is that they remain at too high a level of generalisation (especially when universal as in compression of time and space) although, paradoxically, fixes do provide a highly flexible framework within which to work the concrete and contingent. For, shifting ground

\(^{35}\) Hence his capacity to take appropriate stances on underconsumption, Harvey 1982, and the role of capital-labour and capital-capital relations, especially in view of the new Brenner debate, Harvey 1999, p. xxv.

\(^{36}\) See Fine 2001b for the notion of intellectual policing from the actor-network perspective and Whatmore 1999, p. 25 for purporting to catch Harvey at it for the nature/society dualism.

\(^{37}\) Harvey 2000, p. 82.
substantially in terms of subject matter, I have argued elsewhere, controversially and specifically in the context of consumption, that such complexity needs to straddle the internal/external divide by addressing what I call the systems of provision [SOPs], attached to particular commodities or commodity groups. To each SOP is also attached a cultural system, for which the separating out of (commercial) cultural products is entirely arbitrary (as if food, clothes, cars were not cultural as such or systemically). The SOP approach is recognisably ‘vertical’, moving from production through to consumption (and disposal). This is not to insist that all analyses must be vertical; the built environment systemically (re)combines the ‘horizontal’, not least as a Harveyian complex commodity. But, to put it bluntly, and as with Brenner’s investment overhang hypothesis, the gap between the ‘macro’ analysis and the diverse and details and experience of ‘micro’ sectors is not so much flawed as absent. Possibly Harvey’s ‘new’ imperialism is unduly read off by generalising from oil to other sectors which do not conform so readily to its characteristics in economic, political, cultural and military domains.

In short, in order to bring together and unfold the tensions between the internal and external contradictions, the ideas of globalisation as compression of time and space, of spatio-temporal fixes, and cuts in crises are too broad and general; they (and culture, justice, the body and the environment) need to be tied to capital(ism) at more concrete levels. No doubt, my differences with Harvey reflect our respective positions as geographer and economist. He has been working within a discipline, with his own high profile, with a strong if declining tradition in Marxism, thriving and newly emerging heterodoxies, and a traditional division to straddle between its human and physical sub-disciplines. It is hardly surprising, strategically commendable,

---

39 See Fine 1998 on labour markets for example, but also Fine 2002a, Chapters 10 and 11 on collective consumption and the welfare state, and Fine 1993 in debate with Glennie and Thrift 1992 and 1993. Note that Harvey 1990, p. 346 borders on the SOP approach for culture: ‘Cultural production and the formation of aesthetic judgements . . . as a production, marketing, and consumption system, it exhibits many peculiarities in the form its labour process takes, and in the manner of linkage between production and consumption’ (emphasis added). See also Harvey 1985a, p. 69, for the idea of hierarchically structured provision of housing as the means by which to appropriate rents; and Harvey 2001, Chapter 18, where the wish to address commodification of culture, but to avoid economic reductionism, can be interpreted as feeling towards a SOP approach through the notion of highly context-specific monopoly rents.
40 See Fine et al. 2005 for the demonstrable fallacy of Brenner’s account in case of the world steel industry, a sector that might be thought to be most favourable to his cause.
that he should focus upon geography’s own concerns, as it has been subject to a cultural turn in general and to a wave of fads in particular, such as ‘flexibility’ and ‘globalisation’. To contribute critically to these themes, and some of his own choosing such as justice and utopias, has been imperative and overwhelmingly successful in the task of retaining a hold on the material world and its domination, lest we forget, by capitalism. To address the ‘geographical’, the specifics of the external as opposed to the internal from the perspective of polecon, has rightly taken precedence in Harvey’s work over intensive development of a political economy that has remained unread by others but whose presence has, nonetheless, remained heavily flagged by Harvey himself.

Past limits, new horizons
So much for the past, geographical or otherwise, what of the future? Elsewhere, I have argued that the current intellectual climate is marked by two fundamental features.\(^4\) One is the retreat from the excesses of postmodernism; the other is the retreat from the excesses of, and agenda set by, neoliberalism. Taken together, unevenly and in diverse ways across both disciplines and topics, reflecting their traditions and continuing momentum, this represents a turn away from the cultural, a return to material realities. The meteoric rise of ‘globalisation’ is a striking index of these trends, as is that of its complement, social capital, although the two are very different kettles of fish in methodological, theoretical, empirical and policy terms. Inevitably, revival of interest in the material world has raised the profile of the economic. It does so in the context of a further, more specific trend across the social sciences, reflecting a revolution in or, more exactly, around economics.\(^2\) This is the resurgence, in new virulent form, of economics imperialism, the colonisation of the other social sciences by economics. The previous phase involved the crudest reductionism of all economic and social phenomena to optimising, or utility-maximising, individuals as if in the presence of a perfectly working market. The new phase has been inspired by its treatment of the economic and the social as if reducible to optimising (possibly collective) behaviour of individuals in face of market, especially informational, imperfections. In this light, economic and social structures, alongside institutions, customs, trust, culture, norms and so

\(^4\) Fine 2004, for example.
on are purported to be explained as the rational time-dependent response to market imperfections. Again, the response across the social sciences to economics imperialism is varied in depth and content. Within geography, for example, it is represented by the new economic geography, spearheaded by Paul Krugman.43

Taking these trends together, I draw the conclusion that there will be a debate over the economy across the social sciences but it will not take place within economics as the latter has already driven out dissent.44 Rather, in place of and even appropriating a political economy of capitalism, economics will seek to foist its own market-imperfections vision of capitalism upon the economy, society and other disciplines. The outcome outside economics is open, as is indicated by the current contrast between globalisation and social-capital literatures, respectively. One is potentially radical, systemic, conflictual, class-based and contextual, the other essentially and increasingly oriented around self-help and positive-sum games raised from the individual to some level of collectivity lower than the nation and avoiding state, trade unions and political organisations. Broadly, and more generally, three mixes of outcomes are possible across the social sciences and topics that do or do not straddle them. First, economics imperialism may win out, especially where rational choice has taken hold as in much of the new institutional economics, the new political economy, the new development economics and the new economic geography. Second, there may be a retreat from confrontation with the economic, as in the previous cultural turn, with a corresponding division between sub-disciplines. This is notable in economic and social history,45 and, of course, geography. Last, and most encouraging, is the potential for continued hostility to the alien methods and assumptions of economics (imperialism), even if they are dressed up more palatably and informally in the language of colonised disciplines. But the dual retreats from postmodernism and neoliberalism need to be wedged to a renewal of the polecon of capitalism, one which sees capital(ism) as a key category that articulates material and

43 For critical exposition, see Martin 1999, Martin and Sunley 1998 and Goodacre 2006 and Schmutzler 1999 for a revealing if uncritical account. See also the astonishing Fujita and Krugman 2004 in an interview following the award of the first Alonso prize for regional science. They essentially put forward a theory of the incidence of combined and uneven development without any reference whatsoever to the state.


45 Milonakis and Fine 2008.
cultural studies, and straddles other dualisms. It is not simply polecon itself that is at stake but the future content and direction of each and every discipline and topic.

For the coming period to be negotiated successfully, there is much work to be done, not least in redressing the poverty of polecon across the social sciences that is the heritage of the cultural turn, the antipathy to Marx – and other – isms, to mainstream economics (understandably), and to the economic in general. Geography, often considered the poor hybrid relation to other disciplines, is particularly well placed to promote its own agenda and for this to feed into those of other disciplines. For many, these perspectives are, no doubt, an exercise in one analytical dinosaur desperately seeking to keep another alive. But, otherwise, the body of work that Harvey has provided is surely not the last word on polecon and its application to the non-economic. It is, however, much of the first, whether as foundation or point of departure.

This commentary, then, provides a perspective from which to look back over the intellectual scene and also to look forward. As observed, it has, until the mid-1990s, been dominated by the pincer grip of neoliberalism and postmodernism, setting if not settling the analytical agenda. The results have been uneven and diverse across disciplines, with economics and geography lying at opposite extremes in many respects. Economics has been untouched by the cultural turn and has excised all heterodoxy. Geography has incorporated both postmodernism and a powerful influence from Marxism, for which Harvey deserves more credit than most, if not all, and it has primarily rejected old and new economic geography.

But, if not as much as other disciplines, geography has suffered a decline in knowledge and use of Marxist political economy. Despite its celebrated status and reprinting after twenty years, the fate of Harvey’s Limits is a telling testimony to this view. Thus, discussion of the sort in the special issue of Antipode is notable for its absence over the intervening period, and the same is true of the record of publication of the New Left Review’s ‘publishing house’. The appearance of Brenner’s account of contemporary capitalism is remarkable for its rarity, irrespective of its content. It also inspired outrage from the Marxist economists for its unsatisfactory theory, in contributions that could,

---

in the main, have been written thirty years previously, so limited has been the engagement with the world of capital as opposed to that of Capital.47

Unlike others, Harvey has both retained his Marxist political economy and extended it critically, more than any other, to the concerns both of evolving geographies and cultural turns. The high priests of Marxist economics have left him alone, and geographers have mostly used him for a political economy fix rather than as foundation as for his own work. This is all about to change with the dual retreat from the extremes of both neoliberalism and postmodernism. Intellectuals have increasingly, again in diverse and uneven ways, sought to come to terms with the nature of the realities of contemporary capitalism, not least through concepts such as globalisation (largely captured from neoliberalism) and social capital (neoliberalism’s humane form).48 Again, outcomes will be varied across the social sciences and, crucially, remain open and subject to fashion and influence. In this light, it is hardly surprising that Harvey’s Limits should now be celebrated and re-issued despite being more than twenty years old and that his own cultural turns and contemporary events should have brought him to confront the ‘new’ imperialism. As always, with scholarship, endeavour and sensitivity to what is needed, Harvey has shown the way through the analytical waters whose troubles conceal their underlying transparencies. It remains to be seen whether his admirers will follow his example more closely than they have in the past.

References


47 For gentle rebuke of Brenner on the role of capital-labour and capital-capital relations, see Harvey 1999, p. xxv but Harvey 2003a for appreciation of its empirical content.


David Harvey

Comment on Commentaries

It is always tempting to take up the cudgels of comradely criticism and wage warfare within the labyrinthine trenches of Marxian theory when given the opportunity. I will try not to do that in what follows, but I cannot resist beginning with one picky theoretical point. Contra Ben Fine, I actually believe that far more theoretical mileage is to be had out of Marx’s undeveloped notion of monopoly rent than any amount of fiddling around with his theory of absolute rent. And, yes, this does derive from my particular views on value theory and the transformation problem. However, when Fine dubs my use of Marx’s monopoly rent concept a ‘SOP’ he takes things too far. I developed this idea in several talks given in art institutions and at major cultural events (Noel Castree will be pleased to know). At issue was how to understand the role of cultural producers in a world where cultural industries were becoming more and more important to urban development (from Sheffield to Shanghai). I wanted to show how the corporate capitalist interest in authenticity, originality and uniqueness (‘sponsored by . . .’) had everything to do with extracting monopoly rents from commodifying cultural forms, local histories and creativities. The cultural producers got the idea
straight away and it gave a sharp anti-corporate focus to the discussion. Had I used the concept of absolute rent, even if theoretically correct, I doubt anyone would have understood. In this case, however, theoretical consistency and the communicative imperative happily coincided. We have an obligation not only to theoretical rigour but also to communicability.

Consider, from this perspective, my use of the term ‘accumulation by dispossession’. People who know nothing of Marxian theory sense immediately what I mean. I only have to mention pension rights, the illegitimate use of eminent domain, the privatisation of water, credit crunches and loss of health-care rights to get most people to sit up and listen. Eyes glaze over if I insist on ‘primitive accumulation’ as the correct formulation. Now, I do think it theoretically reasonable to refer to what occurred in the originating stages of capitalism as ‘primitive accumulation’ (and it may be perfectly reasonable to use this term in the case of contemporary China). I would argue, however, that the on-going cannibalistic and predatory practices occurring even within the advanced capitalist countries under the guise of privatisation, market reforms, welfare withdrawals and neoliberalisation are better described as ‘accumulation by dispossession’. They are qualitatively different, theoretically, from what happened at the origins of capitalism. I am not arguing that we drop all Marxian theorising and pander to popular understandings, but when an easy shift in language can be far more politically effective why not use it? ‘Account must be taken of the audience’, Ben Fine correctly advises, before expressing his preference for primitive accumulation as the correct term to use.

This idea of accumulation by dispossession does require, as almost everyone observed, critical scrutiny. The term has almost instantaneously been taken up (almost certainly because it is so evocative) and I worry about the indiscriminate way in which it might be (and already has been!) used. I had a similar experience in the past with the concept of ‘time-space compression’. As with that conception, some of my initial caveats have been ignored. In *The New Imperialism* I did not argue that all dispossessions are wrong and should be resisted. Everything depends on the class character of dispossession, and I am certainly in favour of dispossessing the bourgeoisie! To the degree that progressive development of any kind entails some degree of creative destruction, I argued that we should not wax nostalgic for some lost past

---

1 See Harvey 2003.
either. I recognised that the innumerable conflicts and political struggles against accumulation by dispossession could be cross-cutting and incoherent and that some of them might be reactionary. I agree entirely that much more work needs to be done to specify in what ways the term might best be used and to what effect. I cannot take up this matter in any detail here (I hope to do so elsewhere) but I found the critical engagements of my interlocutors, particularly those of Sam Ashman and Alex Callinicos, very helpful. I am hopeful that we can push both the analysis and the politics along in progressive ways.

Ellen Meiksins Wood’s commentary, however, troubled me more generally. I had not realised how important the ‘formal separation’ of the ‘political’ and ‘economic’ within capitalism was for her. I had read it as tactical rather than fundamental. It produces a weak theory of the contemporary state that I cannot accept. The state is far more than a mere territorised institutional support for what capital requires. This view is, in any case inconsistent with what Wood herself describes. If contemporary imperialism is about perpetual war (actual or possible as the case may be) then it is states that wage or threaten such wars. The formal distinction between extra-economic and economic power does not work in practice either. We are surrounded at every turn with ‘public-private partnerships’ and an incredible interpenetration of state and capital practices (institutionally, politically and even ideologically). How, for example, do we understand the powers of the Federal Reserve, the IMF, the WTO and other more shadowy state-like institutions such as the Bank of International Settlements? And if capital has liberated itself from territorial logic to the point where it can operate freely across a politically supine world of nation states, then why is US political and military power so important, as Wood herself asserts? In Wood’s account of perpetual war, it is the political and military hegemony of the US (i.e. territorial logic) that is central.

Wood’s distinction between extra-economic and economic power leads her into a serious misunderstanding of accumulation by dispossession. She understands it as a manifestation of ‘extra-economic’ power. But, in my account, it is most importantly exercised through the credit system and financial power. I construe this as primarily economic rather than extra-economic. But, once again, the only way I can make sense of events is by keeping the dialectical intersection of territorial and capitalistic logics at the centre of the analysis. My theory of the state (which needs some work) does not appeal to some
precapitalist form but sees a radical transformation in that form as the
dialectical relation of the state with capitalistic logic comes to dominate from
the mid-nineteenth century onwards. Consider, for example, what happened
in Argentina in the crisis of 2001. Fears were mounting that the peso-dollar
parity was going to collapse as foreign portfolio capital (capitalistic logic
at work) rapidly withdrew. Massive bank withdrawals of dollars occurred
(truckloads of dollars were taken to the airport and shipped to places like
Miami). Bank accounts were then frozen by state edict (a territorial-based
action) and shortly thereafter the peso was devalued to one third its former
value. This amounted to a $12 billion write-down of the dollar value of bank
deposits within the territory of Argentina. Those who had taken their dollars
to Miami could now bring them back into the country at three times their
value. This was bank robbery by the political élites. This is an example of
what I mean by accumulation by dispossession. It is impossible to separate
‘formally’ where state power ends and capitalistic logic begins, even though
state edicts and money flows are identifiable and separable moments in this
process. This dialectical formulation works and Wood’s formal separation
does not.

I now understand more clearly why Wood, in her account of The New
Imperialism, makes no mention of the formation (as opposed to the existence)
of the European Union, NAFTA, Mercosur, the G7 (now G8) and the incredible
powers that have been assembled in international financial and regulatory
institutions in recent times. Since none of these fit with the picture of supine
nation-states doing the bidding of capital (US-based? Or is it of the US political
and military hegemon?), they are simply air-brushed out of the frame of
what makes contemporary imperial practices so new. I can well understand,
and indeed to some degree share, Wood’s objection to the simplicity of Arendt’s
formulation that an accumulation of economic power requires a parallel
accumulation of political power. Yet I thought Arendt’s formulation provided
a good entry point to look at the emergent institutional and political
arrangements through which the politics of global capitalism and hence
contemporary imperialist practices are increasingly being articulated. If some
states have indeed been reduced to supine adjuncts of capital, then perhaps
structural adjustment by the IMF has had something to do with it. So while
I share Wood’s view, contra that of Hardt and Negri and John Holloway, that
we should in no way abandon the struggle to command state power, I think
the struggle against the IMF (‘Fifty Years is Enough’) as well as more localised
struggles are also very relevant.
This brings me to the issue of geographical scale. I find it astonishing that Ben Fine can look at the successive maps of Baltimore and not see any real difference apart from scale, as if scale does not matter. This is the kind of thinking that says the concept of democracy forged at the scale of the Athenian agora applies to contemporary Sao Paulo or Tokyo-Yokohama. The dynamics of capitalism have played a critical role in re-shaping spatial and temporal relations (yes, that pesky concept of time-space compression, properly understood, has deep relevance) and we avoid the implications of such transformations at our peril. I therefore find bizarre Fine’s assertion that specific examination of space and time is irrelevant because they are universal ontological categories confronting those of value analysis that have already moved beyond this stage. I am persistently astonished at the way in which Marxists, with their abstract commitments to dialectical materialism, resist open discussion of the dialectics of ‘space-time’. Fine will doubtless be shocked at my formulation of the spatio-temporality of Marxian value theory in *Spaces of Global Capitalism*. He also thinks it senseless to talk of the dialectics of territorial and capitalistic power because the former is an ontological universal and the latter is historically specific. For me, territorial logics (including the formation of the state itself) are as much a social and historical construction as is capital. While it is true that time and space are ontologically primary in a way that, say, gender and ethnicity are not, that does not mean they are fixed. Relative and relational views of space-time, as opposed to absolute Newtonian and Kantian constructions, are specifically about the malleability of space-time metrics in relation to processes. In the contemporary world, the circulation and accumulation of capital (particularly in its finance form) has great salience as a primary process through which the metrics and scalars of space and time are shifting.

It is, in my view, impossible to understand the confluence of concepts like globalisation, neoliberalisation and imperialism without confronting the radical shifts in spatio-temporal dynamics forged through the dynamics of capital accumulation over the last thirty years or so. The dual capitalistic imperative to diminish turnover times and to reduce or eliminate spatial barriers to movement has been worked out through technological shifts (everything from computerised design and production networks to the internet) and institutional transformations of great moment. One effect is to change the spatial context in which territorial powers are exercised. Contrary to Wood’s formulation,

---

2 See Harvey 2006.
territorially based power is no longer if it ever was confined to the territory of its base. When the FAA in the US changes its regulations, every airline that flies into the US must obey those rules, so that de facto the FAA is the global regulator for the whole airline industry (with the exception of, say, local flights in the Caucasus where smoking is still permitted). The only country where an internet country address is not required is the US.

Here arises contestation over signs of hegemonic power. Chinese regulation of the internet is one example and, more recently, the US demand that all airlines flying passengers into the US collect and communicate personal information about their passengers (including even health records) has been rejected by the European Court as illegal, posing the technical possibility that all trans-Atlantic flights will shortly be suspended (imagine what that would do to the capitalistic logic of power!!). The broader question of where hegemonic power is now located is therefore of great moment and Hardt and Negri are not entirely wrong to note the decentring, the re-territorialisation and the reconfigurations going on in how the political and territorial logic of power is now working. But, again, I think this needs careful analysis of material processes (how the circulation and accumulation of capital reshapes space-time and reterritorialises power) rather than metaphorical hyperbole (of the sort that Arendt did indeed engage).

Behind all this lies a simple theory and one that I probably need to re-state. The fundamental problem (or contradiction, if you will) for capitalism is a tendency towards overaccumulation (I am neither an underconsumptionist nor a LTFRP advocate, as Ben Fine alternatively proposes). Capitalism is always about the production and appropriation of surplus-value (and the purpose of introducing accumulation by dispossession is to emphasise that appropriation can sometimes try to do without production). Capitalists then need to find ways to profitably absorb the surpluses they produce but they can only do so by producing more surpluses. The role of geographical expansion and restructuring in all of this is vital and this is what the recent bout of globalisation and the whole history of capitalist imperialism has basically been about. Sutcliffe gets my theory entirely wrong when he makes it seem as if I say China merely absorbs overaccumulated capital. The whole point of my theory is to say that, if surplus capital moves from A to B in a desperate search for profitable outlets, then at some point B will become a producer of surplus capital. China is both an absorber and a producer of surplus capital. This is what I documented in the cases of South Korea and Taiwan, both of
which absorbed surplus capital until the 1980s and then, in addition to having to export commodities had to move into capital exports, generated their own distinctive forms of sub-imperialism (under the umbrella of US free-trade imperialism). China is now doing the same.

I agree, of course, with Bob Sutcliffe that the question of China deserves far more extensive treatment than I was able to construct but I have subsequently tried to rectify that in A Brief History of Neoliberalism.\(^3\) I also agree that there is much that is uncertain in how matters will evolve there, particularly since the changes are so rapid and so radical that almost anything one can say is almost instantaneously out of date. The volatility we now see not only in China but throughout global capitalism is itself a problem, particularly since it so often functions as a mask for something else.

Bob Brenner’s generous and thoughtful comments came in rather late, so I will confine myself to a few remarks. I agree that the US obsession with oil has little to do with profitability of US corporations or with the aggregate state of the US economy (though Rupert Murdoch plainly accords great significance to the latter). And in a situation of outright war, the US would have no problem interdicting China’s foreign supplies. But in between these two extremes there is now an on-going geopolitical struggle, that stretches from Kazakhstan to the Sudan, Nigeria, Angola and, perhaps even more significantly, Iran and Venezuela, primarily though not only between Chinese and American interests for control over oil resources. This struggle cannot be ignored (look at the UN and the politics over Darfur). Unfortunately, the tendency is to say either that oil is everything or to ignore it altogether. Both positions are dangerously wrong. It is in this broader context, and against the background of the long-standing interests (since 1945) of successive US administrations in having a military presence in the Middle East, that we need to situate the Iraq venture.

Brenner mainly focuses on relations between the territorial and capitalistic logics of power. I fear he misreads, as does Wood, my dialectical formulation through positivist lenses. I never argued, for example, that the contemporary state could ever possess interests ‘clearly distinct from, let alone in conflict with, the interest of capital’, because, under the theory of internal relations with which I typically work, such a logical independence is impossible. But interests become intertwined between state and capital and, at certain points,

\(^3\) See Harvey 2005.
the threads get tangled in conflict. While the capitalist logic as expressed by
corporate leaders in wartime said the world should be kept open for capital
as much as possible after World War II, for example, the transformation of
that idea into containment as the rock-solid principle of US geopolitical policy
until the end of the Cold War was another matter. That principle, once set in
concrete, had implications to which capital accumulation had to adapt (many
US corporations chafed at the bit for years with respect to political restrictions
on trade with the Communist bloc). It is hard to understand Vietnam without
that simple translation of a capitalistic wish into an objective realist foreign
policy at the hands of the political establishment. The other twist to my
argument concerns the inner-outer dialectic of any state political formation.
Politicians have to get re-elected in ways that corporate leaders do not and
that public discipline puts constraints upon their actions (look at how they
now wriggle around on the immigration issue in both the US and Europe)
but also impels them to support others, such as the invasion of Iraq, through,
for example, nationalist concerns and security fears.

I profoundly disagree, however, with Brenner’s assertion that the study of
capital cannot account for the current form of the state and that ‘abstractly
speaking, a single state governing global capital is perfectly feasible and
probably most appropriate from the standpoint of capital’. Part of what
I tried to do in the second part of The New Imperialism is to explain how it
is that capital produces territorial/regional configurations that call for certain
structures of competitive governance. I argue that, if states did not exist,
then capital would have to create them. To be sure, the current pattern of
states bears many marks of feudal residuals (particularly in Europe), but
fragmentations of political power and competition between the fragments
are precisely what keeps capital in the saddle in relation to state power.
Deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation of political structures that have
occurred over the last few decades have also to be understood in relation to
changing scales of capitalist accumulation.

Brenner gets me wrong when he attributes a ‘profit-squeeze’ theory of crisis to
me (as opposed to Ben Fine who has me alternately as an underconsumptionist
or a falling-rate-of-profit theorist). I am, in fact, a surplus-capital/overaccumulation
theorist. But there are contingent circumstances when profit-squeeze pressures
play a role. Whether that was the case at the end of the 1960s and into the
early 1970s (particularly in Europe) can be debated (it certainly is not the case
now) but my chief point about that period was the political threat to ruling
classes in Europe (the rise of Eurocommunism, the revolution in Portugal), socialist revolutions in Africa, troubles in Latin America (Allende) and even in the US (remember all that anti-corporate regulation of the early 1970s that established the EPA, consumer protections, and the like). The political future of the capitalist class was threatened as well as profitability because of conditions of overaccumulation registered at the time as chronic stagflation. From the standpoint of the capitalist classes, something had to be done to deal with a threatening situation. And it is in this context that we have to understand the turn towards neoliberalism and the new imperialism. I have since filled in the neoliberal part of that connection in much greater detail.

The role of accumulation by dispossession in all of this is crucial. Brenner is probably right to complain that I inflate the idea somewhat. We agree on relations with precapitalist forms (like the ejidos in Mexico). The dispossession of family farms in the US may be better understood in terms of the normal transfers of wealth and power that occur through the concentration and centralisation of capital. I am not so sure, however, when it comes to the use of eminent domain to take over housing in high-value locations for the benefit of developers and the big chain stores. I think Brenner underestimates the importance of predatory and cannibalistic forms of accumulation that are on-going in the heartlands of capitalism and their imbrication with the dynamics of class struggle. Those public sectors (coal, steel, automobiles, gas, electricity, telecommunications, water) in Britain that were created through years of class struggle were rapidly undone by Thatcher and pushed into the private domain with all manner of consequences. And Thatcher was prepared to open the way for Japanese capital (at the expense of British) in the auto industry precisely to permit the growth of an auto industry on greenfield sites manned by workers who had to accept an entirely different régime of industrial relations. This was deliberate state-led policy in which accumulation by dispossession was crucially involved. I do not think this political project can be absorbed under the rubric of the ‘normal’ processes of capital accumulation in the way that Brenner proposes. And, while the loss of pension rights (in, say, the US airline industry) can be treated as part of the usual class attack upon workers’ standard of living, I think it poses analytical problems of a different kind to those usually treated of in classical class-struggle theories. That the US has used its power and influence to push privatisation world-wide as part of its imperialist strategy is also undeniable. Brenner is wrong to say that the privatisations of state-run industries throughout
the world are best understood in terms of domestic economic developments and internal political conflicts. To be sure, there are always internal elements at work (and we neglect these at our peril), but the wave of privatisations in Mexico under Salinas (that opened the way for an immense accumulation of riches for a few, like Carlos Slim) occurred with a good deal of help from the US Treasury, the IMF and the World Bank. The subsequent takeover of Mexican banking by foreigners in the wake of the peso crisis of 1995 was not a mere aberration either. Again, Brenner is correct to insist that there was an internal element at work in the Asian crisis of 1997–8 but to make it seem as if portfolio capital and the operations of the hedge funds and of the international banks and the IMF had nothing to do with it and that the immense benefits that flowed to Wall Street were purely contingent is terribly off the mark.

The difficulty here in part derives from Marx’s inclusion of finance, credit and debt as crucial elements in the primitive accumulation scenario. It is the continuity and, in many respects, the deepening and widening of these mechanisms for extraction of wealth that impresses me. When the leading hedge-fund managers took home $250 million each on average as remuneration last year then we have to ask serious questions as to how that happens and with what implications. And, politically, as I have already remarked, the idea of accumulation by dispossession is very telling in ways that may override its analytical power. But there is much more to be said on this matter and Brenner’s comments, as well as those of everyone else, provide important caveats as well as further insights on how we might best proceed.

References
My cup runneth over. Not only did the four contributors (and the editor) for the Historical Materialism symposium on Beyond ‘Capital’ (HM 14, 2) celebrate the general project and its most important arguments but, in questioning some aspects, they push me to expand on matters not developed and, even, not fully comprehended. What more could I ask for?

Beyond ‘Capital’ is about class struggle. Not only the struggle of capital against workers (given the drive of capital for surplus-value) that Capital introduces but also the struggle of workers against capital because of ‘the worker’s own need for development’. And this means that we not only see another side of capitalism; we also see another side of capital – how, in order to defeat workers, every aspect of capital necessarily contains within it the drive to increase the degree of separation among workers.¹

¹ I develop this argument further in the Deutscher Memorial Prize Lecture for 2005 (Lebowitz 2006a). Until we consider the side of wage-labour explicitly, we cannot understand capital as permeated by two-sided class struggle; this seems to be the basis of disagreement with Werner Bonefeld, who appears prepared to accept capital as it first presents itself.
Beyond ‘Capital’ is about political economy. Not only Marx’s critique of the political economy of capital but also that other political economy he noted – the political economy of the working class. In developing the latter, we see that it both demonstrates the one-sidedness of tendencies and concepts presented in Capital and also points to the alternative society of associated producers.

The book sums up its arguments by proposing that the continuation of Marx’s work involves

revealing capital as the workers’ own product turned against them, working for unity in struggle, stressing the centrality of revolutionary practice for the self-development of the collective worker and setting out the vision of a feasible alternative.²

Not good enough, say several contributors: where is the political theory?

Their comments, the editor Pablo Ghigliani notes, suggest that ‘the gap between class struggle within capitalism and revolutionary action is only slightly touched by Beyond “Capital”.’³ Since I agree with him about the ‘centrality for socialist politics’ of this question, I accept his recommendation that the political theory implicit in the book be the focus of my reply.⁴

Colin Barker concludes his excellent contribution to the symposium by stressing the need to go beyond a political economy of the working class to a political theory for the working class. Revolutionary socialism, he proposes, needs revolutionary theory – theory which is not only ‘oriented to the self-production of a movement with the real capacity to revolutionise the world and in the process itself and its participants’,⁵ but which also can be ruthlessly realistic about the strengths and weaknesses of the workers’ movement (thereby providing guidance on matters of strategy and tactics).

Barker’s sense that Beyond ‘Capital’ lacked such a theory is supported by the most challenging of the essays, that by Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin. Why did I not go beyond the citations of Marx to engage the ‘vast Marxist literature on working-class politics’ and to consider the 150 year-old history

³ Ghigliani 2006.
⁴ Since the symposium contributors deserve my reaction to their concerns and doubts on other matters, I will try to incorporate these briefly in the context of my response. The criticism by several contributors of my lack of consideration of the ‘competition of capitals’, however, raises specific methodological issues and is the subject of a separate appendix.
⁵ Barker 2006.
of working-class parties (not the least with respect to the state), they ask disappointedly? Certainly, if I were to do this, I would need to spend much time on their own important contributions; however, given that my project in this respect was largely one of deductive reasoning which attempts to establish the inner basis for some of Marx’s isolated aphorisms, exploring the ‘wealth of Marxist accounts and analyses’ here (or on subjects such as technological change) was outside my scope. Nevertheless, their challenge is salutary: if I evade their demand for engagement with the concrete by stressing the deductive nature of my book, then surely I should try to interrogate my own argument for what it implies about a political theory for the working class.

Are the elements of such a theory present in the book? Below is the outline of an initial attempt to follow out the logic of the argument. If I have not made valid inferences from the elements of the book that I identify or if those inferences provoke disagreement, I assume that readers will not hesitate to point this out.

**Elements of a theory**

(i) **Focus on human development**: as the concluding chapter (‘From Capital to the Collective Worker’) underlines, we move in Beyond ‘Capital’ from consideration of the side of the wage-labourer to a focus upon the collective worker and the society in which that collective worker exists not for capital but for herself – in other words, ‘the inverse situation in which objective wealth is there to satisfy the worker’s own need for development’. Human development, the full development of human potential, ‘the rich human being’ and ‘rich individuality’, emerge in the book as the core of Marx’s understanding of true wealth.⁶

(ii) **The vision of an alternative**: that ‘inverse situation’, ‘based on the universal development of individuals and on their subordination of their communal, social productivity as their social wealth’ is the standard by which Marx judges capitalism. Communist society in which our production is an ‘exchange of activities, determined by communal needs and communal purposes’, in short, is Marx’s unstated premise of Capital and the goal for which we struggle⁷

---

That alternative we embrace is one where ‘the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all’.

(iii) The centrality of revolutionary practice: ‘the coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-change’ is at the core of Marx’s understanding of how people develop. Only through practice do people ‘transform themselves, develop new powers and ideas, new modes of intercourse, new needs and new language.’ In particular, the struggle against capital is the way workers develop new capacities and make themselves fit to build larger movements; this is a point on which Panitch and Gindin are especially strong, noting with respect to worker mobilisations that

the measure of their success is not just immediate results, but the struggle’s contribution to the narrowing of working-class separateness and the general development of the collective intellectual, visionary, organisational, strategic, and democratic capacities that make up expressly political capacities.9

(iv) The necessity of theory: precisely because of the inherent mystification of capital, Marx’s critique of the political economy of capital is a necessary condition for workers to be able to go beyond capital because it reveals what capital is – the result of exploitation. As pointed out in Beyond ‘Capital’, the analysis developed in Marx’s Capital is essential for going beyond capital. Without it, there is the unchallenged appearance that the worker sells ‘a certain quantity of labour’; accordingly, exploitation presents itself as the result of not receiving a fair return in this transaction – not receiving ‘a fair day’s pay for a fair day’s work’. Marx’s analysis of capital provides workers with a critical weapon – the reason to negate and abolish capitalism rather than to attempt merely to change it to make it fair.10

In short, the struggles of workers against capital to realise their needs are not sufficient in themselves to go beyond capital rather than to struggle within capitalism.11

---

8 Marx 1973, p. 494; Lebowitz 2003, pp. 178–84. Note that the focus upon the development of human capacities and capabilities and its relation to practice permeates the Bolivarian Constitution of Venezuela. See, for example, Article 62: ‘the participation of the people in forming, carrying out and controlling the management of public affairs is the necessary way of achieving the involvement to ensure their complete development, both individual and collective.’ Cf. Lebowitz 2006c.


10 Lebowitz 2003, p. 198.

11 Panitch and Gindin and Barker identify this problem: the former stressing that ‘the working class is not inherently revolutionary’ (Panitch and Gindin 2006) and the
(v) The necessity for the further development of theory: the political economy of the working class points directly to the social productivity of the collective worker and to the means by which workers are prevented (in each moment of the circuit of capital and, fundamentally, through capital’s ownership of the products of social labour) from capturing the fruits of co-operation. Thus, it stresses the centrality of the struggle to end the separation of the producers and the potential to create a new society in which our communal, social productivity satisfies our own need for development. Moving from the unmasking of capital’s claim to the ‘objective wealth’ produced by past and present workers to consider the collective worker, the political economy of the working class goes beyond the bounds of the critique of the political economy of capital (bounds given by that political economy itself) to encompass all the labour which enters as moments into the production of the collective worker. Those interdependent limbs of the collective worker which are unproductive of surplus-value but produce wealth for workers (as in healthcare, education and the nurturing of children) are recognised as essential in both the struggle for and realisation of a society based upon the worker’s own need for development.

Implications for political theory

(vi) Social democracy. An especial concern of Panitch and Gindin is my apparent lack of analysis of ‘the ideological, organisational and representational practices of social democracy’ and my failure to explain the ‘passing and dismissive terms’ I use in relation to social democracy.¹² I think, however, that I am guilty here only of being too succinct in describing social democracy. Thus, they call attention to my ‘one sentence footnote on the “sorry history of social democracy, which never ceases to reinforce the capital relation”’. However, that footnote begins: ‘[h]ere in a nutshell is the sorry history . . .’, and the ‘here’ refers to what has been said in the text:

Until workers break with the idea that capital is necessary, a state in which workers have political supremacy will act to facilitate conditions for the

¹² Barker proposes that I have wished away ‘the twentieth century problem of reformism’ (Barker 2006) but his concern here appears to focus upon on organisational issues.
expanded reproduction of capital. . . . The state, accordingly, remains entirely within the bounds of the capitalist relation and is its guarantor so long as workers look upon capital’s requirements as ‘self-evident natural laws’.

There should be little doubt that my perspective (‘in a nutshell’) on social democracy is that social democracy in itself reinforces capitalism – and that this criticism is linked directly to the failure noted in (iv) above to recognise that capital is the result of the exploitation of workers. Of course, the particular struggles conducted by trade unions and social-democratic parties are potentially productive of new subjects; however, precisely because it does not understand capital and accepts the logic of capital, social democracy is limited to the struggle for fairness (better slave rations) and backs away from the struggle to go beyond capital. This is a point made more fully in Build It Now under the heading ‘The Failure of Social Democracy’:

Social democracy has always presented itself as proceeding from a logic in which the needs and potentialities of human beings take priority over the needs of capital. . . . If the capitalist sector is the only sector identified for accumulation, however, then in theory and practice the implication is self-evident: a ‘capital strike’ is a crisis for the economy. . . . If you reject dependence upon capital, the logic of capital can be revealed clearly as contrary to the needs and interests of people. When capital goes on strike, there are two choices, give in or move in. Unfortunately, social democracy in practice has demonstrated that it is limited by the same things that limit Keynesianism in theory – the givens of the structure and distribution of ownership and the priority of self-interest by the owners. As a result, when capital has gone on strike, the social-democratic response has been to give in. . . . Rather than maintaining its focus on human needs and challenging the logic of capital, social democracy has proceeded to enforce that logic.

Certainly, there is more to say about social democracy, including the basis for its tendency to demobilise workers after electoral victories (noted below). However, the crucial implication flowing from the theory (under [iv] and [v] above) in Beyond ‘Capital’ should be clear: as long as a political movement does not understand that capital is the result of exploitation and that capital

---

14 This social-democratic perspective was crystallised in the statement of the (New Democratic Party) Premier of British Columbia in the early 1970s: ‘We can’t kill the goose that lays the golden eggs’.
15 Lebowitz 2006c, Chapter 2.
is not necessary, it is doomed to reproduce ‘the sorry history of social democracy’.

(vii) The character of the workers’ state. What kind of state can workers use to go beyond capital? In Beyond ‘Capital’, I argued that not only must the state be prepared ‘to wrest, by degrees, all capital from the bourgeoisie’ (which, of course, has as its premise the understanding of capital) but also that ‘the form and the content of the workers’ state are inseparable’. Only one conception of the character of the state flows from (i) and (iii) above:

Once we begin from human beings as the subjects and understand that people produce themselves through their activity, it follows that only where the state as mediator for (and power over) workers gives way to the ‘self-government of the producers’ is there a continuous process whereby workers can change both circumstances and themselves. . . . The workers’ state brings the producers together in their ‘self-working and self-governing’ assemblies and councils and calls upon them to drive beyond every barrier that capital puts up to their own self-development.

Panitch and Gindin understand my argument well: ‘Lebowitz is trying to get at the idea that the struggle for political power involves more than assuring a change in property relations, that it requires a different kind of state.’ They further recognise that this conception of the state – in contrast to one in which the state stands over above workers – allows for the development of ‘the working class confidence, will, and collective skills that can in fact build and self-administer the alternative society’. Nevertheless, they display a bit of wholesome terror at the words ‘Dictatorship of the Proletariat’.

---

16 I agree with Panitch and Gindin 2006, in short, that this is ‘one of the central questions of what has gone wrong with working-class politics’, but think that the problem is not ‘whether social democracy advances reforms in the name of class harmony rather than class struggle (i.e. as good for capital as well as for workers) in order to make them agreeable to capitalists, or whether they do so because it is easier to win over workers’ support for these reforms that way’. Rather, the basic problem is deeper than the strategy and tactics of political marketing: ‘All the notions of justice held by both the worker and the capitalist, all the mystifications of the capitalist mode of production’, etc. ultimately come back to the failure to understand what capital is. Marx 1977, p. 680.


18 Panitch and Gindin 2006.

19 My identification of this workers’ state with Marx’s conception of the Commune (which he understood as the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’) seems to stir them up. Of course, no one in her right mind organises by making a case for a new, better dictatorship but, precisely because of the misuse and distortion of Marx’s term in the
It is more than a matter of a few words to which Panitch and Gindin are (over-)reacting. When it comes to the concrete experience of trying to create a workers’ state, they remind us that every working-class party that has entered the state, whether by insurrection or election, has soon made it clear that it expected the working class to let the new government now do its thing rather than continue the class struggle outside the state.

I agree that this experience (part of the demobilising character of social democracy) cannot be ignored. Clearly, in such cases, there has not been a focus upon the self-development of the working class at all. Rather, it has been upon doing things on behalf of the working class – i.e. of maintaining a state over and above workers.

But why? Has this occurred because the perspective of those working-class parties has not been permeated by the focus upon human development and the recognition of the centrality of revolutionary practice? Or, is it the result of the conscious decision (despite understanding the importance of [i] and [iii]) to suspend progress on this front until a more propitious time?

I would argue that it is the first – that the essential focus upon human development through revolutionary practice has not been at the core of these past attempts at going beyond capital; in other words, that the problem in these governments which came to power, first and foremost, has been a theoretical one related to the lack of further development of Marx’s political economy of the working class. They did not suspend what they did not think was important to begin with. Nevertheless, if the root is a theoretical silence, the institutions reinforced or newly created which prevent the self-development of the working class are a real relation – one which nurtures the self-development of those who are always prepared to help the working class from making its own mistakes.

In one form, this can be seen in the demobilising aspects of social-democratic trade-union leadership and governments; in another, in the crystallisation of vanguard...
Yes, the opportunity provided to misinterpret Marx’s term, ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’, has not helped; however, the real problem is the complex reality that even ‘a different kind of state’ must face at this point in struggling to go beyond capital. As Panitch and Gindin (following Rosa Luxemburg) stress, if the working class is to have the opportunity to develop its capabilities and to communicate its knowledge and insights, the workers’ state requires freedom of speech, association and press. Unclear from their comments about the suspension of these freedoms in order to forestall counter-revolution, however, is whether they would deny that there will be occasions when the threat of counter-revolution requires even a revolutionary state based upon the self-government of the producers to do everything it can to win.

(viii) Changing the concept of entitlement. The critique of the political economy of capital demonstrates that the exploitation of workers is the source of capital. It thus demolishes the claim of capital as such to its ownership of the products of social labour. But, who is entitled to that ‘objective wealth’ which capital has usurped? Who may appropriately claim the right to subordinate ‘communal, social productivity as their social wealth’?

Limited to the critique of the political economy of capital, one might infer that the exploited workers in the sphere of capitalist production are entitled to repossess that which has been taken from them (for example, an argument for the factory workers, the producers of capital’s wealth, getting their own back). Even within this perspective, however, this conception would be far too narrow: while only within the sphere of capitalist production do workers produce surplus-value, capital requires for its existence not only that it be produced but also that it be realised. By this logic, not only the workers who produce capital directly but also those who ensure that latent surplus-value is made real would be entitled to claim ownership of the wealth of capital. But we are still here within the bounds of the critique of the political economy of capital.

Does anyone really think that the point of Marx’s demonstration of the basis of capital was to argue for the entitlement of a subset of the collective worker (with other workers, then, coming as supplicants to those of the ‘productive sector’)? The political economy of the working class goes beyond the wage-labourers who function within the circuit of capital to all the limbs of the collective worker – including those whose activities directly serve the
worker’s need for development but which the political economy of capital ignores. In the process of considering the articulation of those limbs within a new society of associated producers, a new concept of entitlement emerges which transcends (supersedes) the fact of exploitation as such and incorporates within it that ‘inverse situation in which objective wealth is there to satisfy the worker’s own need for development’.

Following from (i) and (ii) above, all parts of the collective worker, in short, are entitled to draw upon our ‘communal, social productivity’ to develop our potential to the fullest extent possible. Regardless, for example, of the luck of our birthplaces or our own past contributions, from the perspective of the political economy of the working class, the accumulated fruits of social brain and hand belong to us all.\(^{22}\) This is a concept of entitlement which explicitly rejects special privileges for particular workers based upon their activity; rather, it encourages solidarity – solidarity between producers (e.g. in formal and informal sectors), between those of the North and those of the South.\(^{23}\)

At its core is the idea of producing consciously for communal needs and purposes and thereby building a society in which the free development of all is the condition for the free development of each.\(^{24}\)

(ix) The subjects of revolutionary change. Who can change the world? For some, industrial workers are the revolutionary subjects \textit{par excellence}; and, thus, the suggestion that they are not entitled to all they produce will be seen as a dangerous deviation, a theoretical abandonment of the working class. Do they not produce the wealth? Do they not have the power to stop the wheels from turning?

But it is essential not to confuse entitlement with the ability to take an organisational lead in the struggle against capital. It is not because the industrial proletariat is entitled to the wealth of capital that makes them potentially revolutionary but, rather, that capital centralises and organises those workers, thereby facilitating the struggles that can produce them as revolutionary subjects for themselves. Precisely because trade unions were the vehicles for

\(^{22}\) Given how much of the ‘objective wealth’ that capital claims is, in fact, the result of past labour, to counter this claim with one based upon the exploitation of particular workers is to demand ‘elegant tombstones’. Cf. MacPherson 1968.

\(^{23}\) It is not an accident that Marx viewed as a ‘defect’ and continuation of ‘bourgeois right’ the idea of equity based upon the demand for an equivalent for one’s labour. As I have discussed on a number of occasions, this conception has its roots in the private ownership of ‘the personal condition of production, of labor power’. Cf. Lebowitz 1991, 2003b, and 2006b.

\(^{24}\) Clearly, such a society could only be international.
such struggles, Marx described them as vital ‘centres of organisation of the working class’. But, they were always more than organising centres – in particular, they were first and foremost centres of self-development for the working class. That is why Marx stressed the way in which workers in wage struggles produce themselves as other than ‘apathetic, thoughtless, more or less well-fed instruments of production’ and make themselves fit to initiate a ‘larger movement’. 25

Yet, as Beyond ‘Capital’ argues, trade unions are not the only centre for organisation and self-development for workers. 26 Every site where workers struggle collectively to satisfy their many-sided needs, needs which are unrealised because capital rules, is a centre of organisation and self-development. They are struggles of a class, heterogeneous in its particulars but universal in its dependence upon and immiseration by capital. 27 Sometimes some of those centres will be more effective than others – unevenness of development is inevitable, but they have in common that they build the human capacities that are an essential condition for going beyond capital.

Who are the revolutionary subjects? The producers who cannot satisfy their (many-sided) needs because capital owns the products of social labour and directs their use so that capital can grow. 28 Those limbs of the collective worker are revolutionary subjects in themselves because they are immiserated; they become revolutionary subjects for themselves by struggling against capital and grasping that there is an alternative to rule by capital.

Organisational implications 29

(x) The need for a political instrument to unite the collective worker. Given the heterogeneity of the collective worker (and its various forms of immiseration) plus capital’s use of differences to divide the working class in order to defeat

26 The discussion here draws upon Lebowitz 2003, pp. 179–89. Indeed, the tendency to consider trade unions as the only organising centre reflects a particular conjuncture (and even that erroneously).
28 Unfortunately, I am unable to pursue here the interesting question of ‘false’ versus ‘authentic’ needs raised by Campbell and Tutan 2006; for me, what is critical is that workers are struggling to satisfy those needs, whether false or authentic, and thereby transforming themselves. But, see Lebowitz 2003, p. 41.
29 Many of the points I present here are developed fully by Harnecker 2006 which draws upon her Spanish language books on ‘the Left on the threshold of the 21st century’ and ‘the Left after Seattle’ as well as several conference presentations.
it, a political instrument is needed to mediate among the parts of the collective worker, provide the welcoming space where popular movements can learn from each other and develop the unity necessary to defeat capital.  

Illustrating this point concretely, Build It Now makes the following argument in relation to current developments in Venezuela:

Given the enemies of the Bolivarian Revolution (both those outside and inside it), a political instrument which can bring together those fighting for protagonistic democracy in the workplace and in the community is needed. One which can develop and articulate common demands like that of transparency (a necessary condition both for real democracy and for fighting corruption). One based not upon narrow groupings but upon all the popular organizations and representing the interests of the working class as a whole.

How else can the inherent contradictions among those who want the revolution to continue – e.g. contradictions between the informal sector and the formal sector, between the exploited and the excluded, between workers and peasants, between cooperatives and state sectors – be resolved except through democratic discussion, persuasion, and education that begins from the desire for unity in struggle? How else can you prevent contradictions among the people from becoming contradictions between the people and the enemy – except by the creation of a party for the future of the Revolution (rather than its past)? A party from below which can continue the process of revolutionary democracy that is needed to build this new type of socialism.

(xi) The need for an organised effort to communicate theory. The theoretical needs of the collective worker as revolutionary subject are not immense. Much is learned in the very process of struggle, where the importance of solidarity and the identity of friends and enemies become clear. However, precisely because the understanding of (a) the nature of capital and (b) the potential of a society of associated producers to foster human development can not emerge spontaneously from struggle, a systematic way of spreading this basic understanding into all portions of the collective worker provides it with an essential weapon for all of its struggles.

---

30 This is not at all an argument to submerge ‘secondary contradictions’ in the interest of not dividing the working class. On the contrary, as I indicate in Beyond ‘Capital’, it is essential to recognise that struggles against patriarchy and racism (among other struggles which, ‘viewed superficially, . . . appear to hinder the struggle against capital’) transform those engaged in them into new subjects. Lebowitz 2003, pp. 186–9.

31 Lebowitz 2006c, Chapter 7. See the discussion, too, of ‘a body to coordinate all the different emancipatory social practices’ in Harnecker 2006.
(xii) The need for a party of a different type. Nothing could be more contrary to a theory which stresses the self-development of the working class through revolutionary practice than a party which sees itself as superior to social movements and as the place where the masses of members are meant to learn the merits of discipline in following the decisions made by infallible central committees.32

On the contrary, once we focus upon the transformative effect of popular struggles, we understand that, rather than coming to grassroots movements with pre-conceived plans, the point is to learn from them and to spread that understanding. ‘The political instrument’s role’, Marta Harnecker stresses, ‘is to facilitate, not to supersede. We have to fight to eliminate any sign of verticalism which cancels out people’s initiative because popular participation is not something that can be decreed from above.’

Further, understanding the way in which hierarchical structures can sap the creative energy and enthusiasm of those committed to the struggle to put an end to capital points to the need to make the base of any party structure the space for initiatives. Rather than the insistence upon uniform forms of participation (e.g. in the workplace or community), the possibility of autonomous collectives and affinity groups organised according to their interests. Rather than information and instructions passing vertically, the sharing and emulation of ideas and experiences horizontally. Rather than a single line of march in this asymmetrical warfare against capital, guerrilla units functioning under a general line and understanding the need for unity in struggle for major battles – how else to unleash creative energy and foster the revolutionary practice that can produce the people who can defeat capital?

We need, in short, to learn constantly from practice and not reify any particular set of experiences of the past. As Colin Barker concludes his contribution to the symposium:

No one developed the ideas of the Commune in advance of the practical experience of Paris’s artisans and workers in their struggle with the régime in 1871, and Marx paid tribute to their discoveries. There is more to Marx’s critical notion of self-transforming ‘revolutionary practice’ than repeating the ideas and actions of the past.33

32 See the discussion of the practice of Leninist parties in Latin America in Harnecker 2006.
33 See Barker 2006. In Build It Now (Chapter 5), I stress the need to learn from the experience of the twentieth century in the way that Marx learned from the Commune:
There is a ‘gap between class struggle within capitalism and revolutionary action’, as Pablo Ghigliani observed in his ‘Introduction’.\(^{34}\) We do not need to agree with the specific character of the party that Lenin advocated for carrying on the revolutionary struggle in Tsarist Russia to understand the need for a political instrument that can deepen the process of class struggle in all its forms and aid in winning ‘the battle of democracy’. Precisely because of the centrality of this question for socialist politics, I hope that my response to the issues raised in the symposium will provoke a discussion that can contribute to the process of going beyond capitalism.

**Appendix on the competition of capitals**

Capital necessarily exists as many capitals, Marx stressed.\(^{35}\) But, rather than focus upon real capital as it exists on the surface of society, he proceeded to deduce the nature of capital – i.e. to develop an inner understanding of capital. That is the nature of his method: in order to determine what necessarily flows from the concept of capital (e.g. tendencies for overaccumulation, the generation of new needs, creation of a world market, etc.), Marx focuses upon the essence of capital rather than upon its form of appearance as many capitals in competition. And, I embrace that method (with its absolute distinction between inner and outer) – as should be clear from *Beyond ‘Capital’* and from many articles on method which are incorporated in my forthcoming book, *Following*...
Marx: The Method of Political Economy. My concern expressed in Beyond Capital is not with Marx’s method but with its premature closure in the exploration of the inner – i.e. the failure to develop the side of wage-labour.

When Panitch and Gindin, Campbell and Tutan, and Barker suggest, then, that I ignore the importance of (or treat as ‘accidental’) the competition among capitalists, my response is simple: there is no disagreement at all about the real influence of capitalist competition. But my purpose is to see what can be deduced by carrying further the discussion at the inner level, the level of capitalism in general. If they object in principle to making this a priority, their objection is to Marx; if, on the other hand, they consider that Marx’s inner discussion was unproblematic and want to use it to explain a particular set of concrete phenomena, then their objection is to me. In my defence, I will simply suggest that understanding that the drive to increase the degree of separation among workers is inherent in the essence of capital yields insights into the phenomena of contracting out and capitalist globalisation not obvious from a focus simply upon capital’s tendency to develop productive forces.

Although we enter here into methodological matters that call for much more discussion than is possible at this time, I think that most people who seem to want to insert the discussion of competition into the inner (the ‘general and necessary’) analysis are confused about Marx’s method. The following passage from Following Marx (Chapter 11, ‘What Is Competition?’) explains, in part, why the inner argument must be separate and precede a discussion at the level of competition:

Insofar as we live in the world of competing capitals which drive each other forward ‘with a constant march, march!,’ as Marx commented, there is a natural tendency to attribute the inner drive of capital to competition. . . . 37

Unfortunately, using competition to explain the basic drives of capitalism prevents you logically from stressing class struggle over any other struggle generated by competition (or, for that matter, from stressing production over circulation). In the world of competing capitals, nothing privileges exploitation or class struggle: all inputs are viewed simply as costs; and, all reductions in costs (whether in production or circulation and whether these involve reductions in, for example, what is paid for labour, use of land or money-capital) are of equal importance. Thus, increasing exploitation (although

37 Marx 1994, p. 86.
not, of course, in these terms) and economising upon rental payments both are simply responses to the external compulsion exerted by alien capitals.

If capital really existed as One – i.e. if the phenomenal form of capital corresponded to its essence, then it would be clear on the surface that the only way that capital grows is through the exploitation of workers and that it is the class struggle between capital and wage-labour that drives the system forward. Insofar as capital exists in the form of many capitals, however, science is necessary. That science must do what all other sciences do: ‘seek to uncover the essence which lies hidden behind commonplace appearances, and which mostly contradicts the form of commonplace appearances (as for example in the case of the movement of the sun about the earth).’

References


Literature Review

Stuart Elden

Some Are Born Posthumously: The French Afterlife of Henri Lefebvre

When Henri Lefebvre died in June 1991, he left behind a remarkable legacy of writing. Over sixty books of original research, editions of the writings of Marx, Hegel and Lenin, and a couple of edited volumes. A few book chapters and numerous articles, scattered across a range of journals and newspapers, many of which treated topics not discussed in his longer writings, add to his legacy. Lecture courses, currently unpublished, also treated different themes, such as sexuality. As he said in 1975, ‘I write a lot, a lot more than I publish, but I do not consider myself as a writer’. Despite this denial, Lefebvre will doubtless be remembered for his writings above all. Although he writes in a challenging style, erratic and alternately informative and conversational, with digressions, gratuitous attacks on other writers and a wide range of historical, contemporary and literary references,

---

2 Lefebvre 1975b, p. 9.
he is never less than engaging. He was always a committed writer, with a political purpose that can be lost when the context of the writing is forgotten. As he said: ‘I write and above all publish continually thinking of an objective, to convince and to vanquish’.3

Shortly after his death, two other short books appeared, a collection of conversations held in his home in the Pyrenees, and *Éléments de rythmanalyse*, a project he had promised for a long time and which had been a major concern of the last few years of his life.4 *Rythmanalyse* was partly a collaborative work, developing out of two pieces co-authored with his wife, Catherine Régulier.5 The book, however, only bears Lefebvre’s name on the title page, and was edited and introduced by René Lourau.6 At the very end of his life, Lefebvre returns to several of his earlier themes – everyday life, the rural and the urban – and rethinks them through the notion of rhythm. Rhythms are ‘historical, but also everyday, “at the heart of the lived”’.7 His insistent point is that the rhythmanalytical project underlines the importance of grasping space and time together, despite the way they are often kept quite separate.8 ‘No rhythm without repetition in time and space, without *reprises*, without returns, in short without *mesure* [*mesure*]’.9 The work on rhythmanalysis, which examines change through time and space, is both the culmination of the work on everyday life and a return to the analysis of urban landscapes. Philosophically sound and politically aware, it was a fitting end to his career.

With the publication of *Rythmanalyse*, French interest in Lefebvre seemed to die along with the man. A special issue of the journal *Espaces et sociétés* in 1994 offered a tribute to his work on this issue – much of it influenced by the reception of the English translation of *The Production of Space*. But *Espaces et sociétés* was a journal Lefebvre had founded along with the Sovietologist Anatole Kopp in 1970.10 Other pieces appeared in the journal *M*, another review he had founded. A volume of conference proceedings was published in 1994.11 Then, for five or so years, almost nothing was said about this writer.

---

3 Lefebvre 1975b, p. 9.
5 Lefebvre and Régulier 1985, 1986.
7 Lefebvre 1992, p. 97; English translation p. 87.
8 For example, Lefebvre 1992, pp. 71, 109; English translation pp. 51, 100.
10 Coornaert and Garnier 1994.
in France, despite the way in which in other countries – Britain, the United States, Brazil and Germany, for example – interest was high and rising.

All this has changed over the last few years, with a number of Lefebvre’s books reissued, including new prefaces or introductions, along with the appearance of a previously unpublished manuscript. Although some of his books are still in print, including the classic introductions Le marxisme and Le matérialisme dialectique, and others come in and out of print erratically, many have been unavailable for decades. This work of reissuing is therefore long overdue and extremely important. It is worth noting that, during Lefebvre’s life, several of his books appeared in new editions, often with new material. The new material was usually in the form of a preface, which sometimes resituated the book in a contemporary context, or reflected upon the situation of its writing. Given that Lefebvre’s books were political documents of struggles against fascism and nationalism, and those within the PCF, Western Marxism, and French society, it is important to understand where he was coming from. To take one example, Le nationalisme contre les nations was written in the mid-1930s, in the context of the rise of fascism and the Right more generally, as part of the movement around the Popular Front and the Communist alternative of internationalism. A 1988 postface looks at how these issues can be reflected upon in the light of the dissolution of empire, the notion of mondialisation, and in the wake of Algeria.12

There are three people central to the recent re-editions of Lefebvre’s work: Lourau, Rémi Hess and Michel Trebitsch. Lourau was a colleague of Lefebvre’s from Nanterre, and the two writers had cited each others work, particularly in writings on the state from the 1970s. Lourau died suddenly, shortly after completing his preface to the reissue of Lefebvre’s book on the Pyrenees.13 Rémi Hess, who was Lefebvre’s final doctoral student and who wrote an authorised biography in 1988, has been the key figure since Lourau’s death, presenting several books in a series he edits for Anthropos/Economica. His prefaces are important in introducing Lefebvre’s ideas to a new generation, although there has been considerable recycling of material from his other writings. Both Lourau and Hess were influential in the ‘Institutional Analysis’ movement. Hess describes the project in this way:

---

Our aim is to allow today’s reader to have an idea of the movement of the work of one of the most important philosophers and sociologists of the 20th century.14

But it is the third, Trebitsch, a researcher based at CNRS who also died recently, who is, to my mind, the most interesting of the writers on Lefebvre. He introduced a number of Lefebvre’s books in English translation, and was behind the recent reissue of Nietzsche in France. He wrote a ‘Présentation’ to Le nationalisme contre les nations and also wrote some extremely important pieces on the early part of Lefebvre’s career, particularly around his work in the Philosophies group and his relation to surrealism.15 Trebitsch favoured a much more textual and contextual approach than Hess, making use of archive material in showing how Lefebvre’s writings emerged from the situation at the time. The Groupe de Navarrenx are also important in the renewal of interest. These were a group of researchers that used to visit Lefebvre in his family home in the Pyrenees, and wrote a book that collected a number of their essays on the theme of the social contract and citizenship. The group includes Armand Ajzenberg, Lucien Bonnafé, and others who have recently launched an online journal named after Lefebvre’s biography La somme et le reste.16

In the following brief discussion of the books published in the last few years, it seems useful to deal with them thematically.17 I begin with philosophy, because Lefebvre was first a philosopher, and thinking this through is essential to understanding both his Marxism and his work on everyday life, urban and rural sociology and politics. As a young writer in the group Philosophies, who published the journal of that name and also the revue L’Esprit, Lefebvre wrote about Schelling, Hegel and Nietzsche. These were his principal interests until he discovered Marxism in the late 1920s, which led to the Philosophies group publishing the important La Revue marxiste. Lefebvre’s first book, co-authored with Norbert Guterman, was the Hegelian La Conscience mystifiée, a classic of interwar Marxism.18 Their account of class consciousness, intellectual life, the rise of European nationalism and a host of other themes introduced many of the issues Lefebvre would work with for the rest of his life. This

---

14 Hess 2001b, p. vi.
17 For a much more detailed discussion of Lefebvre’s work, see Elden 2004.
18 Lefebvre and Guterman 1999.
book, and an earlier piece entitled ‘La Mystification: pour une critique de la vie quotidienne’, are also crucial in understanding the philosophical underpinnings of these later concerns.

The version of Hegelian Marxism proposed here certainly bears comparison to Lukács, who Lefebvre and Guterman claim not to have read at the time. Lefebvre and Lukács later became friends, and it is worth noting that History and Class Consciousness did not appear in French translation until 1960. To a lesser extent there are similarities to the work of Karl Korsch. Lefebvre and Guterman are, therefore, central to the introduction of a new type of Marxism into France, a Marxism that had as its central text the 1844 Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts. Portions of these had first been translated into French in the 1920s by Guterman, and they were prominent in the 1934 collection of Marx’s writings edited by the two friends. In the introduction to that book Lefebvre had stressed their key importance in understanding Marx’s work – work that now appeared as philosophical and sociological as it was political and economic. The manuscripts were crucial inspiration for La Conscience mystifiée, which also includes a section from them in an appendix.

The re-edition of this text also includes prefaces by Bonnafé, Lourau and the one from the 1979 second edition by Lefebvre and Guterman, as well as a short text by Lefebvre entitled ‘La conscience privée’, intended as a sketch of a sequel for a proposed series entitled La Science des idéologies. The series was abandoned due to numerous constraints – Guterman was in New York; the political situation in Europe deteriorated fast; and other concerns emerged in their work – but many ideas found their way into other writings, notably Lefebvre’s Critique of Everyday Life series. La Conscience mystifiée was an essential first major statement in Lefebvre’s career, and is central to understanding his work as a whole. It was rejected by Communists in the USSR and France, and banned and destroyed by the Nazis.

Two other recent re-editions are also from the early part of Lefebvre’s career, and both show his engagement with contemporary events. 1946’s L’Existentialisme was a polemic, written quickly on PCF instructions in order to counteract the popularity of Sartre. (It is interesting to note that Lefebvre and Guterman’s Morceaux choisis was Sartre’s principal source in L’Être et le

---

19 Lefebvre and Guterman 1933.
20 Lukács 1960; The English translation, 1971, cites the French translation as useful in the preparation of that version.
21 Marx 1929a, 1929b, 1934.
néant for the quotes from Hegel.22) It is a very angry book, denouncing
the movement as 'the magic and the metaphysic of shit'.23 Although there
is some interesting analysis in here, it is one of his least successful books, serving too
many purposes and masters. Lefebvre suggests that his earliest works of 1924
were existentialism avant la lettre, that he had discovered Marxism and been
cured of this sickness, and that Sartre and his compatriots would hopefully
be similarly cured. He puts his own errors down to youth but wonders what
Sartre’s excuses are for his ‘juvenile presumptions’.24 Along the way there are
readings of Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Heidegger and Husserl, but these are
fairly superficial and the real worth of the book is biographical. Lefebvre both
outlines events in his own life and that of the movement, and the book as a
whole is perhaps best remembered as a historical document.

What it does show, however, is Lefebvre’s interest in philosophy as a ‘critical
conscience’ on real life.25 Existentialism matters to him not because it is merely
wrong, but because it is dangerous, and a diversion from the importance of
class struggle and revolutionary politics. A similar motivation runs through
his book on Nietzsche, published in 1939 shortly before the Occupation.26
Despite Lefebvre’s claim, the book was not the first to challenge the fascist
reading – Nicolas’s De Nietzsche à Hitler was published before it27 – but it was
an important study. Indeed, the book was put on the prohibited Otto list the
following year and was seized by the German occupying forces and burnt.
Very few copies seem to exist of the original edition. Lefebvre looks at the
similarities and differences between Marx and Nietzsche, and suggests that
each can supplement and advance the thought of the other. Both are seen as
critics of Hegel, and indeed this trilogy of thinkers would occupy Lefebvre
for much of his life.28

The reading is interesting because it bears comparison with Heidegger’s
lectures given around the same time; Walter Kaufmann’s postwar rehabilitation;
and acts as a challenge to Lukács’s The Destruction of Reason.29 Despite the
problems of Nietzsche’s thought, such as the dubious nature of the will to

---

22 Sartre 1943; Hegel 1938.
23 Lefebvre 2001a, p. 63.
24 Lefebvre 2001a, p. 20.
25 Lefebvre 1950.
26 Lefebvre 2003.
27 Nicolas 1936. See Lefebvre 1975a, p. 147, n. 5; p. 46 n. 16; and for a discussion,
28 See Lefebvre 1975a and 2001e.
power and the admiration for some repressive historical figures, Lefebvre believes that the positives outweigh them. The notion of overcoming, the critique of the state, nationalism and mass consciousness are valuable, and Nietzsche’s work is important to understanding Lefebvre’s work on history, time, rhythm, space, difference and the role of the lived and the body. This is not a merely academic exercise but an attempt to both utilise his ideas and challenge a dominant political appropriation.

In the 1960s, structuralism was in some senses the equivalent of existentialism in the 1940s. A radical movement in thought, it occupied a position of considerable influence. Because he proposed a new reading of Marx, Althusser was Lefebvre’s principal target, although Lévi-Strauss and Foucault were also attacked. Lefebvre had some sympathy with Roland Barthes, who became a friend. Although the key text Au-delà du structuralisme was not published until 1971, it was made up of texts published over the decade of the 1960s, and this engagement was sustained in several other books, notably La Langue et la société; Position: contre les technocrates and Métaphilosophie. The last of these, reissued by Syllepse in 2001, is also Lefebvre’s most significant mature philosophical statement.

In Métaphilosophie he draws upon a range of influences – including Marx, Hegel, and Nietzsche, but also significantly Heidegger – for a way of actualising Marx’s Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach. That is, to change the world, rather than merely interpret it, is a change that is informed by and builds upon philosophy. Lefebvre asks what it would mean to “realise”, “go beyond”, “overcome” philosophy (Marx, Nietzsche, Adorno, Heidegger), and is concerned with how this thought, by prolonging traditional philosophy, would relate to the world. Metaphilosophy is not a simple after philosophy but is, rather, a metamorphosis of it. It aims for something more than the Marxist or Hegelian Aufhebung and something better than the Nietzschean Überwindung. But in philosophy’s becoming worldly, it simultaneously goes beyond. As Marx said in one of his earliest writings: ‘the becoming philosophical of the world is at the same the becoming-worldly of philosophy; its realisation is its loss’. Much of Métaphilosophie is devoted to an analysis of praxis, but instead of being content with this he also analyses the notion of poiesis. These

---

30 Lefebvre 2001c.
31 Lefebvre 1986, pp. 81–2; Lefebvre 1980, p. 90.
32 Lefebvre 1986, p. 47.
33 Marx 1967, p. 62.
are the two aspects of the creative process – practical production and creative production. Marx is important here, but Heidegger is probably the most significant figure, although Lefebvre is more inclined to use his work as a basis or model rather than to directly appropriate his insights.

Although it rarely makes sense to divide Lefebvre’s work into periods, one exception is his work on rural and urban sociology which stretched from the late 1940s to the mid 1970s. Within this period the concern with rural issues lasted for just over a decade, before being supplanted by an interest in urbanism. Lefebvre suggests that the reason for the change in emphasis was the building of a new town, Lacq-Mourreux, near his birthplace in Navarrenx. A number of books were written about these issues, some of which have been reissued. These include the collection of essays *Du Rural à l’urbain*, which tracks precisely the development noted above; *Espace et politique*, the second volume of *The Right to the City*; and the very personal study of the Pyrenees.34 Additionally, among the re-editions is the book which has received such interest in the English-speaking world, *The Production of Space*, and his eyewitness account of May 1968, *The Explosion*.35

What is clear from looking at these books as a whole is that the work on the urban was a result of earlier studies of the rural, and that *The Production of Space* is a theoretical summation of all this research. With the urban and rural, the issue is of thinking their historical relation and not seeing the urban as the only civilised form of life. *The Production of Space* is both a work of theory and a study of the history of spatial configurations, but also includes reflections on different places and situations. Lefebvre had done a large amount of fieldwork in locations as diverse as Paris, the Pyrenees, South America, Canada, North Africa, New York and Japan.36 It is a work of practical philosophy, theoretically informed and politically aware. But it should not be seen in isolation. Areas supposedly neglected in the work, such as class, are treated in detail in books such as *Du Rural à l’urbain* and *Espace et politique*. Equally the work on the rural, while perhaps more historically distant from us today, was a place where one of the most productive theoretical innovations of Lefebvre’s work is to be found. This is the regressive-progressive model of analysis, developed from Marx’s insight that the key to anatomy of the ape is to be found in the man, the adult the key to the child, and capitalism

34 Lefebvre 2001d, 2000a, 2000c.
the key to earlier economies, rather than the other way round. Lefebvre employed this idea in the study of rural configurations, but also particularly in his work on the state. The model was used by Sartre in Critical of Dialectical Reason, where he described it as ‘beyond reproach’.

It might seem strange to include Lefebvre’s study of May 68 within the works of urban sociology. But this is a study which gives particular emphasis to ‘urban phenomena’. Like his study of the Paris Commune of 1871, Lefebvre analyses the way in which urban space is a crucial determining factor in the events, and how that space is designed, recoded and utilised in the struggles. The book on 1871 analyses Haussman’s redesigns of Paris, the distribution of the proletariat, transport networks in France, and the use of barricades in the conflict; the 1968 book focuses on the marginalisation of workers and students, the reworking of the spaces of the Latin Quarter and the difference made when transport links break down. They are crucial to understanding Lefebvre’s concerns with centre-periphery relations, as the key argument is that the marginalised seek to reclaim the centre. A spatial analysis, a class analysis, a political analysis. There are other important studies in this area which have not been reissued, such as The Right to the City, The Urban Revolution, and La Pensée marxiste et la ville, but the work of reissuing has been most extensive in this part of Lefebvre’s work.

Two other books highlight an interesting side of Lefebvre, his concern with questions of art, literature and aesthetic representation. In the late 1940s and in the 1950s Lefebvre wrote a range of books on significant French thinkers and writers – including Descartes, Pascal, Rabelais, and Musset. The book on Rabelais has been reissued, as has the more general study Contribution à l’esthétique. Elsewhere in his writings, he deals extensively with the question of music. Aesthetics is, for Lefebvre, central to the way in which we perceive the world. It is clear that his work on music helped him to understand time, and his work on painting, including discussion of Picasso and an unjustly neglected study of Edouard Pignon is a crucial stage in his understanding of representations of space. Lefebvre turned to these areas of study, particularly the work on literature, in a time of considerable political and intellectual

38 Sartre 1960, p. 50; 1963, p. 51.
39 Lefebvre 1965.
42 Lefebvre 1956.
difficulty. Increasingly marginalised within the PCF, and prevented from publishing some of his more overtly political writings, Lefebvre wrote about the great figures of French literature.

The study of Rabelais is a marvellous example of this. Lefebvre weaves intellectual and social history, literary criticism and methodological reflection into an important and challenging study. Although it is not obviously political, Lefebvre makes a number of important claims about intellectual history, Marxist biography and political context. Early concerns with rural matters and everyday life are combined with an interest in comedy and fantasy as means of social critique. Lefebvre situates Rabelais within a particular period, the economic and social situation of France at the time, the emergence of new forms of economics, literary techniques and of modern individualism. Lefebvre suggests he is at the cusp – neither entirely able to escape his time but equally not completely constrained by it. Rabelais’s writings trade upon earlier models, but also anticipate the modern novel; he is a peasant writer that traces the emergence of a new bourgeois class; Panurge is in some senses the first modern individual; and the book highlights the birth of the national, the French language. The book is introduced by Christine Delory-Momberger, with Hess providing a short preface concerning Lefebvre’s centenary.43

Contribution à l’esthétique is another matter entirely. It was prevented from being published for some time by PCF censors, and was eventually let through in part because of a fabricated quotation from Marx serving as an epigraph – ‘Art is the highest pleasure that man gives to himself’. The other epigram was from the Soviet theoretician Zhdanov. Zhdanov’s two camps doctrine, applied to aesthetics as much as politics, is crucial to understanding the context of Lefebvre’s work in this area. Zhdanov had established the Union of Soviet Writers and was responsible for much cultural policy. Not only is Lefebvre appropriating French writers for a Marxist purpose, challenging bourgeois interpretations, he is also asserting the fact that they are French, challenging the American cultural hegemony of the period. Both of these were of interest to the PCF. But equally, Lefebvre is engaging with Marxist approaches to biography, social history and aesthetics. Indeed, Contribution à l’esthétique, even though it uses Zhdanov alongside Marx, is a challenge to accepted orthodoxy, notably socialist realism, hence the delay in its

publication. The irony is that it was translated into several languages, including Russian.\footnote{Lefebvre 1989, p. 538.}

However, it is one of Lefebvre’s weaker efforts, as he himself recognises,\footnote{See Lefebvre 1989, pp. 536–9.} and does not seem to me to have much interest or relevance to our understanding of him today. This is not the case with all his work of this period, for alongside *Rabelais*, the studies of Pascal and Descartes, in particular, are well worth further investigation. Together with the short study of Pignon, they show how his later more explicit concern with questions of spatiality are grounded upon studies of aesthetic and metaphysical understandings of this notion. A similar concern is found in *Méthodologie des sciences*, which appeared in 2002.\footnote{Lefebvre 2002.}

However this was not a reissue, but a new book, one that had lain for 55 years in a drawer. In 1947 Lefebvre had published *Logique formelle, logique dialectique*, a book that was supposed to be Volume 1 of a series to ‘illuminate’ dialectical materialism. *Méthodologie des sciences* was to have been the second volume and though it was written, it was censored by PCF officials. The twocamps doctrine extended to sciences as well. Lefebvre had got into all sorts of trouble with the party machine for claiming that logic and science were the same in Paris, New York and Moscow. ‘I said that $A=\overline{A}$ or $(A+B)^2$ is the same formal identity in all countries, all régimes, all modes of production’.\footnote{Lefebvre and Régulier 1978, p. 37.}

It has to be said that the book is somewhat of a disappointment, although there are some interesting discussions of the sciences, showing Lefebvre was familiar with several debates in mathematics and geometry that would later inform the work on space. The disappointment comes from the way that, like *Logique formelle, logique dialectique*, and *Le Matérialisme dialectique*, it has a somewhat didactic tone, not entirely surprising given its designed purpose as part of a series to contextualise and illuminate dialectical materialism.

A more interesting work in terms of Lefebvre’s overall trajectory is the 1970 study *La Fin de l’histoire*. Lefebvre’s work on time, history and becoming is an essential forerunner to the later work on rhythms, and clearly demonstrates a side of Lefebvre which seems crucial to me in challenging the spatial bias of some recent, particularly Anglophone, interpretations. We should not forget that *The Production of Space* is, despite its title, a very historical book. Lefebvre’s three favoured thinkers, Hegel, Marx and Nietzsche, are deployed to think
through a range of issues. Lefebvre is concerned with challenging the work of Daniel Bell, and despite sharing the title, his work is a much more pessimistic and Marxist study than Francis Fukuyama’s later work.\textsuperscript{48}

Lefebvre argues that there are three interlaced themes within the book: ‘End of history. End of the sense of history. Sense of the end of history’.\textsuperscript{49} We should remember that \textit{histoire} has the additional sense of a \textit{récit}, an all-encompassing narrative. Equally sens can mean direction, and should make us ask where history is going. Lefebvre sees Marx and Hegel as crucial to forming our understanding of history; and Nietzsche as a central critic of this. But Nietzsche was, of course, a historian of sorts and, like him, Lefebvre is concerned with thinking about what the purpose of history is. In the period where the largely ahistorical structuralism was holding sway, Lefebvre’s book is a serious methodological statement. It demonstrates his faith in the Nietzschean notion of \textit{Überwinden}, \textit{surmonter}, as well as the Hegelian/Marxist notion of \textit{Aufheben}, both of which are implied by Lefebvre’s use of the term \textit{dépassement}. Equally, it shows Lefebvre’s interest in the notion of \textit{le devenir} over the notion of \textit{l’être} – in a critique of Heidegger. While Lefebvre’s work on space is indebted to Heidegger, his work on time and history is much closer to Nietzsche. And, on the problematic notion of genealogy, he is closer to Deleuze’s reading than that of Foucault.

There is, as can be seen, little overall logic to this series of reissues. None of the books are without interest, and the introductions from Hess and others usually contribute to the contemporary reception of his work. But large areas of his work are neglected, perhaps most especially the more overtly political writings, notably the four-volume \textit{De l’État}. This was Lefebvre’s last major work, written between 1976 and 1978, which, despite its relatively recent date, is both out of print and hard to find second-hand. \textit{The Survival of Capitalism} has appeared though. It is a book which in the French edition makes extensive reuse of material from \textit{The Explosion} and partners it with an analysis of why capitalism has continued beyond the predictions of its demise. Compared to the magisterial \textit{De l’État}, it pales in comparison, but it contains some important analyses, and makes use of material that is sometimes sparse in Lefebvre’s writings, namely economic matters.

This programme of reissues is therefore to be welcomed, and it is to be hoped that it continues, and brings into print some more unjustly neglected,

\textsuperscript{48} Bell 1960; Fukuyama 1992.

\textsuperscript{49} Lefebvre 2001e, p. 147.
almost forgotten works. Some early works are extremely difficult to find, such as the 1938 study of Hitler; some of the middle period works on Descartes and Pascal, and even later works such as *De l’État* and *Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche* would merit re-edition. But we have already had some highlights, of which I would particularly underline *Méthodologie des sciences* and *Nietzsche*. Despite the former being previously unpublished, I think that the second is even more of an event, because the difficulty in tracing copies has made this study practically unavailable to a generation of scholars. There are other unpublished materials, such as the manuscript of an early work, *Philosophie de la conscience*, which Lefebvre himself envisioned would one day appear.50

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, I would like to make a few general comments about the way it seems to me that Lefebvre is being read in France, and suggest some areas in which future work may continue.

It seems clear that Lefebvre’s work is being read in a number of ways and, although there are many readers interested in his work on space and urbanism, this is but one aspect of his contemporary reception. This could perhaps be contrasted with the Anglophone reception, where his work is regularly cited by geographers and urbanists but is not widely known outside these areas. The French reading is more philosophically nuanced – both in terms of his readings of contemporary movements and his more programmatic efforts. But what it realises is that this is not separable from his more practical analyses. Equally, the reading is political. Despite the lack of reissues in this area, there is a good deal of interest in his writings on citizenship, difference, capitalism and the state. This much was shown from some of the recent conferences on his work in Paris.51 Lefebvre’s analyses of *mondialisation* and the world scale from the mid 1970s, while not being reducible to *globalisation* do prefigure much of the analysis. Similarly, his work on popular protest is related to antiglobalisation movements. This work is found both in the study of 1968 and his book on the Paris Commune, and also in a short 1970 text, *Le Manifeste différentialiste*.52

---

50 See Lefebvre 1985, p. 168 n. 1. Some extracts from this work appeared in the journals *Philosophies* and *L’Esprit*. On *Philosophie de la conscience*, see Lefebvre 2001a, pp. 16–17, n. 2; 1989, p. 512.

51 For a brief report, see Hess 2001b, pp. xv–xvi; 2001a, pp. xlvi–vii.

52 Lefebvre 1970c.
In contrast, the work on everyday life (another key Anglophone concern) is not talked about so much, although there is a recognition that this concept is practically at the heart of everything he did. Indeed, although there have been no reissues of his work in this area, this is hardly necessary, as the three volumes of the series *The Critique of Everyday Life* – the most important statements of his work in this area – are still in print. A related point is that while, in the Anglophone world, Lefebvre has been appropriated within a left-leaning poststructuralism, the French reading appears to be much more Marxist. To a general French reader, Lefebvre is probably still best known for the bestseller of the ‘Que sais-je?’ series *Le marxisme*. As mentioned, Lefebvre was involved in translations and presentations of Marx’s work, but also wrote several books on him. His work on Hegel, which predates Kojève, and his studies of Lenin (especially Lenin’s notebooks on Hegel) put Lefebvre at the forefront of the development of Western Marxism. Moreover, his readers seem to be somewhat older, more politically active, and to an extent less academically orientated than their Anglophone colleagues.

However, it is worth mentioning the danger of a kind of ‘authorised’ Lefebvre. Rémi Hess, for example, wields a position of considerable power both in terms of his role in the Anthropos re-editions, his prefaces to these books, and his acting as gatekeeper to the rights of Lefebvre’s work. Although his biography is an important study, it is a somewhat partial approach to the thinker and his writings. Hess is repeating himself in his introductions and, therefore, bringing other people into this work is to be welcomed. Other perspectives are needed in the continuing work of reading and re-appropriating Lefebvre’s writings. It is for this reason that the work of Michel Trebitsch is to be applauded, and his demise mourned. Trebitsch’s studies included plans for a biography, but what work we do have is extremely useful in contextualising the early part of Lefebvre’s career. In the English language, the book by Rob Shields, Bud Burkhard’s *French Marxism Between the Wars* (which treats Lefebvre and those around him in detail), and, I hope, my own *Understanding Henri Lefebvre* have added to the reassessment of Lefebvre’s work. In Germany, Kurt Meyer’s book has been recently complemented by a study by Ulrich Müller-Scholl.

---

53 Lenin 1938.
Taking Lefebvre’s work into this new century requires both a reappraisal of what he actually wrote and an analysis of what his work can be used for today. The re-editions are therefore extremely welcome and, in English at least, are being partnered by some new translations and collections. Lefebvre’s work seems to offer renewed potential for thinking about the relation between time and space, rather than privileging one over the other. This was one of the themes of my earlier book, *Mapping the Present*, which examined Heidegger and Foucault, and of my study of Lefebvre. Lefebvre’s philosophical orientation, both within and without orthodox Marxism, bears much more detailed analysis than it has received. The work on philosophy and Marxism, and the philosophy of Marxism, is the key to his writings. Equally, the work on the state repays careful study and development. Lefebvre was involved in debates concerning state theory, *autogestion* – self-management – and *mondialisation*, all of which can speak to contemporary concerns. In English, I would point to the work of Neil Brenner in furthering these concerns. Lefebvre was a political thinker through and through, and his writings were always theoretically underpinned. If it remembers this, the re-editions and the posthumous reception of his work will serve him well, as it both contributes to his survival as a thinker and develops his insights.

References


Marx, Karl 1934, Morceaux choisis de Karl Marx, translated by Henri Lefebvre and Norbert Guterman, Paris: Gallimard.
Review Articles

The Return of Cosmopolitan Capital: Globalization, the State and War
NIGEL HARRIS
Reviewed by PETER GREEN

The Return of Cosmopolitan Capital confirms that Nigel Harris has lost none of his intellectual ambition or stylistic panache. In the course of less than three hundred pages, Harris attempts a survey of the origins and transformations of a capitalism he dates back several thousand years. In the process, he seeks to challenge what he regards as the Marxist orthodoxy about the relationship between capital, states and war and provide a survey of ‘the new world order’ and debates over globalisation. Yet this is a book which is a pleasure to read, the product of a lifetime’s work, summarising a mass of material with magisterial concision and thought-provoking finesse.

What is at stake is not just an academic argument about the past. The Return of Cosmopolitan Capital marks the culmination of Harris’s long journey from a commitment to international socialism to the politics of cosmopolitan liberalism. Like Meghnad Desai, whose approving comment is quoted on the flysheet, Harris now believes that ‘capitalism is the only game in town’.1 If Desai is curiously anxious to wear the mantle of Marx himself for this claim, whilst Harris is rather more self-conscious of his breach with tradition, the former Stalinist and one-time unorthodox Trotskyist are united now in what might be termed, somewhat anachronistically, global Menshevism. Capitalism, they would both argue, is far from exhausting its potential for developing the forces of production. It has survived the crises of the twentieth century and is now once again in a new phase of expansion. For Harris, in particular, we are now seeing the ‘real bourgeois revolution’ or ‘the establishment of the power of world markets and businessmen over the states of the world’ (p. 264). To resist this process,

1 The quote is from Desai (2002, p. 303) not from Harris but could equally well have come from the latter. For a highly critical take on Desai see the review by Kiely 2003, who locates him as a ‘market fetishist’. The same could be said of Harris, but the book under review has much more historical substance than Desai’s rather gossipy ramble through twentieth-century Marxist debates. Kiely, however, fails to emphasise the truth in Desai’s depiction of Marx as a prophet of globalisation.
to be ‘anti-globalisation’, regardless of the intentions of those involved, amounts to an alignment with the forces of the old order, the world of war-making nation-states. There is, he implies, no other choice on the world-historical agenda.

Nobody familiar with Harris’s work over the last twenty years should be surprised by one of the central themes of this work – a stress on the emergence of a new world order characterised most fundamentally by the globalisation of capital, a process still ‘partial and uneven’ but nonetheless inexorably undermining the old ‘state-centric’ order. Of Bread and Guns, published twenty years earlier in 1983, was a prophetic work in its emphasis, unusual at the time, but now of course commonplace, on the internationalisation of capital and the weakening of the power of national states. Some have still been shocked by the degree of enthusiasm with which Harris now embraces globalisation as offering, to quote from the final paragraph of the book, an immense vision of hope for the world – to escape from the domination of states and their preoccupation simply with national power and in the past, war. . . . Not only can world incomes grow far faster in an economically integrated system, growing wealth and the ending of the national constraints on people’s behaviour has the power to release very much more human creativity. (p. 264.)

The specific claims will be explored critically at more length below. But, when Harris identifies ‘. . . xenophobia – and its ugly children: racism, religious bigotry, chauvinism and all the other varieties of chronic or mild patriotism [as] the cancer of a global civilisation, the AIDS of the new world order’ (p. ix), he should be applauded. In his other recently published work, Thinking the Unthinkable, Harris has exposed with much passion and polemical effect the iniquities and irrationality of immigration controls in a world of globalising capital. The audience may have changed, as Harris now addresses himself to the fora of the American University in Cairo (where parts of the work were first delivered as lectures) and the World Bank rather than the revolutionary Left. But we should acknowledge a consistency of focus, hostility to all the manifestations of nationalism, which can be traced back to the politics of his youth and the inspirational internationalism of the Communist Manifesto. Along with Hardt and Negri in Empire,
Harris believes that globalisation is finally undermining the material basis of national state sovereignty, the drive to war and all the appalling ideological baggage that went with it.\(^6\)

The paradox is that this optimism is joined to a barely acknowledged pessimism about the prospects for human liberation as Marx understood it. For Harris, ‘if capitalism and markets were abolished, this would only profoundly expand the power of the state’ (p. 264), a conclusion the banality of which belongs better in the editorial columns of the *Economist* magazine. For all their postmodernist excesses and distaste for dialectics, Hardt and Negri at least insist on the pervasive contradictions of a structure which remains parasitic on the labour and creativity of the multitude and still needs to be overthrown. For Harris, the only contradiction that matters is between the expansion of the world market and the persistence of ‘the old ruling-class of states’ who act as a ‘fetter on production’ (p. 263), and are still capable of irrational acts of exclusion and war but doomed, it would seem, to fade away as the ‘real bourgeois revolution’ prevails. Fatally, not just for the politics but for the history, class struggle vanishes from sight, although it makes a brief rather spectral appearance towards the end.

For many Marxists, that omission will suffice to dismiss the book and its author, without paying any attention to the historical argument which takes up most of the book. That however would be a mistake. Harris is quite right to insist that ‘globalization undermines the way we approach the present and thus forces us to reconsider the past’ (p. viii). In particular, it obliges us to look again at what has become ‘taken for granted’ about the relationship between nation-states and capital. If Harris’s own account suffers from serious weaknesses and some gross lacunae, it nevertheless constitutes a coherent challenge to at least some of the standard ‘Marxist’ mapping of the terrain. In the rest of this review, I will attempt to assess, firstly, the historical account contained in the first two parts of the book, and, secondly, Harris’s analysis of globalisation and the emergence of a ‘new world order’.

**History: capital, states and war**

The historical section of the book opens with one of its more questionable claims. ‘Trade, the response to and the development of markets, has a stronger claim to being the essence of capitalism than any other activity’. Harris counterposes that argument to an identification of capitalism with ‘the factory system’ and suggests quite correctly that the decline of the latter (at least in the developed world) ‘hardly represents the

still prepared to write of the ‘tyranny of the market’ as well as the ‘dictatorship of the bureaucracy’ (p. 285).

\(^6\) Hardt and Negri 2000. See further my commentary on *Empire* which draws some comparisons with earlier work by Harris (Green 2002).
end of capitalism’. Yet Harris should be aware that the issue is not a matter of factories or any other particular type of workplace but how we define capitalist relations of production and the centrality in Marx of the generalised sale of labour-power as a necessary condition for capitalism to prevail over other modes of production. Repeated but rather vague references to how trade impacted on production in earlier periods only serve to blur an essential distinction between mercantile capital which relies on ‘unequal exchange’ (buying cheap and selling dear) and capital which directly controls the productive process, extracting surplus-value.7

This does not invalidate much of the story he does tell. The conventional view, he maintains, mistakenly regards the rise of ‘national capitalism’ managed by national states as the origin of ‘capitalist society’. For Harris, cosmopolitan capital independent of any particular form of state, and cutting across the territorial divisions of rulers has a much longer history dating back several thousand years. There is no precise moment of origin but many different examples of surges of growth stimulated by trade, none of which until the last proved sustainable. As always with Nigel Harris, the story is replete with fascinating nuggets of information, ranging in this case from the highly productive innovations of Sung China circa 1000AD to a nineteenth-century global network of Indian traders selling handicrafts to Victorian tourists (p. 85). If one aim is to challenge Eurocentric explanations of growth or its absence in the global economy drawing on the work of Janet Abu-Lughod and others, there should be no objection.8 Harris is also right to insist that what was distinctive about the European experience from the sixteenth century was predicated on the emergence of a system of competing and war-making national states.

Harris can happily quote from Marx’s chapter on primitive accumulation the famous formulation that ‘force is the midwife of every old society which is pregnant with a new one’ to support his claim for the decisive role of the state in promoting the new ‘national industrial systems’.9 European states, he suggests, were driven by the demands of war to co-opt and corral the pre-existing structures of cosmopolitan capital (non-European states including the USA disappear from the picture at this point). Mercantilism restricted trade but provided favoured companies with monopoly privileges and profits whilst states, in turn, acquired the resources necessary to sustain their burgeoning bureaucratic and military apparatus.

However, Harris ignores Marx’s exploration of the other dimension of primitive accumulation, the dispossession of the bulk of the population from access to land and other means of production. The creation of a working class distinct from a peasantry with its own means of subsistence was, of course, a lengthy process and elements of

---

7 Marx’s chapter in Volume III of Capital, ‘Historical Material on Merchant Capital’, remains an invaluable source on this although its comment as on India and China require correction in the light of more recent historical research. (Marx 1981, pp. 440–55)
9 Marx 1976, p. 916.
such a class can certainly be found in Sung China, medieval Flanders and the Italian city-states. Brenner falls into the polar opposite error from Harris when he suggests that only the unique outcome of class struggle in England with the defeat of the peasant revolts of the fourteenth century can explain the emergence of a class of free labourers and thus, in the longer-term, industrial capitalism. Brenner virtually ignores the commercial revolution which occurred in Italy and the Low Countries, well before the dramatic explosion of European trade with Asia and across the Atlantic in the sixteenth century, both of which were necessary to stimulate and sustain the growth of production for the market in England and elsewhere. Harris, however, writes as if the bourgeois revolution in seventeenth-century England, culminating in the changes after 1688 which prepared the ground for the industrial revolution in the following century, was of minor significance.

Later, Harris invokes Engels, this time on how the Russian Tsarist government set about ‘breeding a Russian capitalist class’ (p. 79) following its defeat in the Crimean War and recognition that industrial development was now a precondition for military success.

The state inventing a national capitalist class was an innovation in Marxism, but one which more closely fitted the reality of national development in Europe generally, not just in backward Russia. (p. 79.)

But these bourgeois revolutions from above, as they are commonly known, were necessary only because of the impact of the bourgeois revolutions from below on the economic and political capacities of rival states. The French revolutionary wars and Napoleon feature in the story only as a demonstration of the ‘immense potential of popular war’ – the question of the necessity of the revolution itself to remove the fetters of the Ancien Régime on the further development of French capitalism is not even addressed. For Harris, the issue of who controls the state is irrelevant as all states become subject to the logic of geopolitical competition and the imperatives of war-making.

Certainly, states were frequently active agents in the process of capitalist development and much of what Harris has to say on this is uncontroversial. One can also agree that the rulers of states, for much of this period, from the Tudor monarchs to the Prussian jünker Bismarck were more often driven by considerations of military capacity and

---

10 See the Brenner debate in Ashton and Philpin (eds.) 1985.
11 I am well aware that, by referring to ‘bourgeois revolution’, I am appealing to a tradition which has been widely challenged by ‘revisionists’ on both the Right and the Left. Here, I can only appeal to the survey of the field by Alex Callinicos (1989) who, rightly in my view, insists on an ‘objective’ definition in terms of the consequences of the revolution, not the consciousness or social origins of the participants.
12 Engels in Marx & Engels 1990, p. 38 (not p. 34, pace Harris) who, however, proceeds to note that ‘such a class cannot exist without a proletariat, a class of wage-workers’ – hence the necessity of emancipating the peasantry from serfdom.
13 The argument owes much to the neo-Weberians such as Michael Mann 1988 and Charles Tilly 1990.
political power than by the direct pursuit of profit. The bourgeoisie has rarely ruled directly, although the active engagement of businessmen in politics is more common than Harris’s insistence on the exceptionalism of the Venetian oligarchy will allow. What was at stake, by the eighteenth century at least, was not just the question of who ruled, in the sense of occupying the seats of government, but the social relations of capitalism within which European states were increasingly enmeshed. National states did co-opt and promote capital, but modern capitalism was not merely ‘the creation of the modern state’. Capital demanded and obtained from states the guarantees of its own successful reproduction at home and abroad. Not least that included measures from the Enclosure Acts to the Poor Laws, which ensured a labour-force with no choice but to sell its labour-power on the market. In the process, capital also became increasingly ‘national’, although it took the wars and depression of the first half of the twentieth century to fully subordinate national economies and private capital to the authority of state planners and military machines.

Of course, the history is necessarily selective and Harris provides the usual disclaimers. But he moves too quickly from a general thesis which is persuasive to specific claims which are much more dubious. The general thesis is that ‘the logic of territorial power does not conform to the logic of capitalism nor vice versa’ (p. 47). The territorial ruler, unlike the merchant, is tied to a particular territory (or set of territories) and its population, reliant on taxes, plunder and the mobilisation of force. Capital, by contrast, has always had a globalising tendency and was long resistant to being confined by national boundaries. There was nothing inherent in the logic of capital, however defined, which demanded a multiplicity of national states, even if, as Harris notes in passing, some form of state was necessary to guarantee security and enforce contracts and property rights. The rivalry of states which, especially in Europe, generated a succession of wars was, in its origins, a product of competing territorial and dynastic claims, not of capitalist competition as such. Tilly, on whom Harris relies heavily at this point, is correct to suggest that ‘War-making, extraction and capital accumulation interacted to shape European state-making’.

However, the consolidation of capitalism also impacts on the objectives of war. Harris highlights the Venetian ‘mobilization of military power’ to establish a monopoly of trade in the Eastern Mediterranean and thus indirectly with Asia. The intrusion of the Portuguese, followed by the Dutch and later the British into the Indian Ocean and beyond followed a similar pattern. Monopoly was a recipe, of course, for fabulous profits – and sustaining monopoly, at home or abroad, was invariably dependent

---

14 The US case was exemplary in this respect long before the current Bush administration.
15 An argument which Teschke, in his very Brennerite approach to the emergence of a system of rival nation-states would also endorse, although, for Teschke, this is testimony to the absence of capitalism in all European states apart from Britain before the nineteenth century (Teschke 2003).
16 Tilly in Evans et al. (eds.) 1985 p. 172.
upon the protection of states. The fusion of interest between merchant and state power may have been ‘ambivalent’ as in the Dutch case Harris briefly discusses. But one legacy was a pattern of imperial expansion and a new type of colonial/trade war very different in purpose to the wars of religion and dynastic succession which also characterised the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Europe. Wars may invariably have been waged by states or for the control of states, but they were no longer aimed simply at the aggrandisement of the territorial states themselves. As colonies were seized, swapped and plundered, their potential profitability for private capital became one of the stakes of war.17

Yet, when Harris comes to the later development of national capitalisms, states alone and their rulers, locked into a system of geopolitical competition are responsible for war, nationalism and imperialism. Capitalists are now at best the fortunate recipients of contracts, interest on the national debts and the privileges of monopoly, at worst, the victims of the destructive impact of the military machines. Territorial empires of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are located as the creation of states seeking to exclude their rivals and explicitly contrasted with the commercial empires of Venice or the Portuguese in Asia (but presumably not in Brazil).18 Harris hesitates at this point, clumsily qualifying the argument. Empire, it seems, was important for private business, ‘but the rest of the world was generally very much more important’ (p. 84).

The argument skates over too many issues which historians have debated at some length to be at all convincing. Certainly not all colonies were profitable, and only a minority of capitalists depended exclusively upon the profits that were generated. But, from the slave-trading privateers of the Elizabethan era, via the looters of Bengal led by Robert Clive, through to the gold-grabbing adventurer Cecil Rhodes, there were private interests capable of dragging or cajoling an often reluctant British state into further rounds of imperial expansion and war. Harris emphasises India’s importance ‘as a key constituent of British global military power’ and is right to do so – but it is unnecessarily gratuitous for him then to claim that it was ‘not as crucial for British business’. The two dimensions of power and profit cannot be measured on the same scale. What we do know, but Harris fails to mention, is that even the free-trade imperialists of the early nineteenth century, who opposed further territorial acquisitions, were not prepared to countenance abandoning an India already critical to the fortunes

---

17 The Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, which ended the war of the Spanish Succession, awarded Britain both lucrative territorial gains and the Spanish Asiento – control of the very profitable slave trade with the Spanish colonies of Latin America and the Caribbean. Harris’s neglect of the slave trade is symptomatic of a wider tendency to exonerate the ‘cosmopolitan capitalist’ from the sins of imperialism, as another reviewer has emphasised (Marfleet 2004).

18 Certainly, the forms of imperialism changed dramatically over eight hundred years of European expansion, but the Venetians were more territorial and the British, Dutch and French far more profit-oriented in their territorial acquisitions than Harris is willing to concede. One of Harris’s positive references to Schumpeter, who attributed imperialism and war in the twentieth century to the legacy of the old aristocratic land-owning class, is also revealing, even if the reference is not to that thesis specifically (p. 83).
of British exporters. Nor could Britain have maintained the gold standard, so pivotal to the fortunes of the City of London, after about 1880, without the aid of the export surpluses and bullion reserves of the Indian colony.

In detaching the interests of private capital from the drive to war and the rival imperialisms of nation-states, Harris pushes his argument to the point where it begins to sound like special pleading. When it comes to Hitler’s Germany, for example, few Marxists would want to claim that big business simply dictated policy to the Nazis, as in the Brecht play *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* which Harris mentions. Indeed, he quotes one indisputably Marxist historian, Tim Mason, to the contrary. Yet one can make that point without ignoring the evidence assembled by Sohn-Rethel, Abraham and others, which reveals that significant sections of German capital, especially in heavy industry, did shift their position decisively in the course of 1932 to supporting the Nazis, following the failure of Papen’s authoritarian conservative régime to eliminate the threat of both further economic collapse and proletarian revolution. Instead, Harris chooses to reference those conservative historians who seek to downplay any link whatsoever between big business and the new régime. The historical record is still open to interpretation, but the interesting question for this reviewer is why Harris wants to insist on the innocence of capital when it is not even necessary for his broader thesis. It is enough to establish, as he does, that Hitler ‘took the logic of the European state system and the stunning economic power which it had released to its final absurdity, to self-destruction’ (p. 101). We can certainly agree that this was not on the agenda of German big business and that it learnt a hard lesson from the experience.

**Globalisation and the ‘new world order’**

In the second half of *The Return of Cosmopolitan Capital*, Harris discusses the world since 1945. On this, he is much more sure-footed. Anyone who has read Harris’s work over the last twenty years will find much that is familiar, even including a reference to Wittgenstein which also featured in *Of Bread and Guns*: Wittgenstein . . . imagined some leaves blown about by the wind and saying “Now I’ll go this way . . . now I’ll go that way” as the wind blew them’ (p. 260).

This encapsulates the sense in which Harris is still very much an historical materialist, sceptical of the pretensions of politicians and planners to control events, and of the ideologies of Right and Left which serve to rationalise those attempts. His politics may have converged with market liberalism, but he is scathing about economic models

---

19 Gallagher and Robinson 1953.
20 De Cecco 1974.
21 Although, as Matthew Caygill has pointed out, Brecht’s play is less crude than Harris suggests, as the ‘Cauliflower trust’ discover that they cannot control the gangster Ui once he is in power and the play ends with Ui plotting to take his ‘protection racket’ global (Brecht 1976).
23 Harris 1983, p. 238.
with ‘a rigour purchased at the cost of any relationship to history – or indeed society’ (p. 261).

That sense of historical dynamics, which owes much to Harris’s mentors Cliff and Kidron,\textsuperscript{24} makes for a survey of the astonishing changes in the world order since 1945 which is often illuminating, even for a reviewer familiar with much of the story. Anyone looking for an accessible account of the postwar emergence of the NICs (newly industrialising countries) of East Asia and their vicissitudes in the 1990s, or the rise and fall of the Soviet Union as a militarised economy will find it here and learn a great deal in just a few pages.

That said, the magisterial style makes it all the more necessary for the reader to hang onto their critical faculties. Harris frequently qualifies his argument, admitting the limits of his historical ‘sketch’ or the possibility of alternative interpretations, pre-empting his critics in the process. But he cannot resist the temptation of making some highly contestable claims with no supporting argument or evidence whatsoever. To take one especially irritating example, there is a passage at the end of a chapter on ‘The Great Transition’, mainly devoted to the long boom of the postwar period up until the 1970s, in which he writes:

\begin{quote}
The national capital project, drive by the state, immensely enhanced the capacity to produce for those who embarked on the contest of states. . . . But with the process, we have suggested, went the beginning of the end of the old system of competitive national capitals, most marked in the developed countries. Capital escaped to recreate . . . a cosmopolitan system beyond the old power of governments. As we have suggested there were many collisions between capital and state along the way, almost always settled in favour of the state. Indeed the severity of the Great Depression can be attributed to the willingness of the state to sacrifice the interests of capital (and hence the incomes and employment of the citizens) to the maintenance of its own power. (p. 140.)
\end{quote}

Here, a suggestive argument about the postwar period suddenly switches focus onto the Great Depression of the 1930s. The last two sentences beg many questions, but the assumption of an identity of interests between capital and the ‘citizens’, whoever they might be, is particularly objectionable given the historical record. I have already referred to the problematic character of the book’s analysis of fascism. What Harris is getting at here, I presume, although it is far from obvious, is the impact of protectionism and the break-up of the world economy into rival trading blocs in the 1930s, which did prolong the Depression. What is disturbing is the blindness both to

\textsuperscript{24}Tony Cliff and Mike Kidron were both leading figures in the International Socialist group, the predecessor of the SWP, which Harris joined in the early 1960s. Characteristically Harris acknowledges the debt in his preface (p. viii).
how many groups of capitalists demanded protection from the state and how capitals independently insisted on the sacrifice of both the incomes and jobs of their workers in a desperate and self-defeating drive to maintain their profits.

There is another, perhaps related, problem with the way in which Harris presents his story, a slipperness in how he characterises the relationship between states and economic development. At the core of the narrative is an incisive argument about the changing historical role of the state. For a long period, up until the late twentieth century, he suggests that states played a developmental role, promoting capital accumulation and an acceleration of growth in the productivity of labour. This was less an objective in its own right than a by-product of the necessary obsession of states with the capacity to wage war, an obsession still evident even in the East-Asian NICs of the postwar period. Yet the freeing up of trade, and investment flows in the course of the postwar boom prepared the conditions for capital to escape the cage, weakening its allegiance to any particular nation-state. Attempts by states to resist this process now become a ‘fetter on production’, with Harris quoting Marx once more, or ‘a source of destruction rather than growth’ (p. 263). Whatever developmental role states might have had, even in the developing world is now ‘exhausted’ and ‘the state in its old form emerges as essentially a parasitic formation’.

Yet, earlier (p. 88), Harris has suggested that the state was always essentially ‘predatory’, and its domination of the market worked to reduce the ‘welfare of the population’ and as such was presumably ‘a parasitic formation’ from its origins. At times, there seems little to differentiate his position from those neoliberal thinkers such as Deepak Lal, for whom anything other than a minimal state guaranteeing private property rights is, and always has been, an obstacle to development. If the historical conditions have changed, and Harris is right to emphasise that they have, it remains necessary to locate more systematically the contradictory character of the national state’s relationship to cosmopolitan capital. In his introduction, he asserts that to call the state capitalist ‘is to use a distinction which is either redundant or contrasted only with an hypothetical alternative’, as ‘any state operating in the modern world must reach some working accommodation with businessmen, domestic or foreign, to secure long-term survival’ (p. 4). Yet one could make the same point about the redundancy of any description of states as ‘essentially predatory’, as all depend upon extracting resources from their local populations. When Harris calls for a ‘finer differentiation’ to analyse the many and varied relationships historically between private business and government it is difficult to disagree. Unfortunately, he ceases to follow his own injunction when it comes to the contemporary world, where all

---

25 Lal 1983. To be fair, Harris would certainly be repelled by Lal’s recent turn to advocacy of a free-trading US-led ‘empire’. But the language of ‘predatory states’ and ‘rent-seeking’, frequently deployed in this book, can be traced back to Lal and his co-thinkers.
states are deemed to act as obstacles to expansion of the system unless they bow to the imperatives of the market.

Despite this, there is much that is right about Harris’s analysis of the changes which are creating a new world order and Marxists need to be able to differentiate the historical insights from the liberal politics which do not necessarily follow. For the sake of symmetry, I will attempt to highlight three contentious issues on which I think Harris needs to be taken seriously, then consider three crippling weaknesses in the account, before concluding with some further comments on the politics of global resistance to the new world order.

Firstly, the globalisation of capital is for real, not a myth as some still maintain, and not an ideological term designed to occlude the manifestations of US imperialism, as others would have it. Harris is often remarkably cautious when it comes to the details. ‘Globalization is still very partial and uneven’ he repeats. In particular, he emphasises that, with labour migration, ‘national protectionism has, if anything, grown more severe during the period of global integration’ (p. 239). He notes, as he did back in 1983 in Of Bread and Guns, that agriculture and the arms industries remain sectors subject to extensive protectionism. National identification persists even among businessmen, although he provides examples revealing the emergence of a small class of ‘genuinely cosmopolitan’ managers and a global cadre of officials capable of moving back and forth between the IMF or World Bank and local ministries of finance (p. 237).

He insists that what is at stake can scarcely be measured adequately using data which are still mostly generated by national agencies using traditional categories. He is even prepared, mistakenly, to concede to Hirst and Thompson that the proportion of savings exported as capital may be less than in the nineteenth century (mistakenly because Hirst and Thompson refer only to net figures for capital flows, subtracting inflows from outflows, not the gross figures which are much more relevant for the argument). But he is right to argue that what is decisive here is less the size of multinationals than the subordination of all national economies and their participants to the discipline of the global market (pp. 159–60).

Secondly, whilst states are still ‘large economic actors’, their power to dictate the allocation of resources is being significantly diminished. A ‘new market-driven economic geography’ is tending, and it remains only a tendency, ‘to supersed the political ordering of the terrain’ (p. 210). One further consequence is the weakening of the

---

26 Robinson 2004 is the most interesting recent attempt at a critique of state-centric theory in a world of globalising capital, which parallels Harris’s account at many points – indeed makes stronger claims about the emergence of a ‘transnational ruling class’ – yet remains resolutely insistent on how this new order is predicated on increased exploitation of the mass of ordinary workers. Robinson calls for a ‘globalization from below’ movement ‘to challenge the power of the global elite’. Unfortunately, he combines this with an underconsumptionist justification for a dubious thesis about global economic stagnation.

state’s powers to tax capital and the rich, whilst even the poor can escape into the world of the unrecorded and criminal known as the ‘shadow economy’. As he quotes from one source by the late 1980s, ‘nearly a third of the profits of US-based international companies were derived from tax havens’ (p. 221) and that figure has not been reduced even by cuts in the formal rate of corporation tax. The sovereignty of governments is also being undermined by the proliferation of supranational institutions and global regulations. So, he concludes in his chapter on governance, whilst formal democracy may spread, the capacities of democratic governments diminish, undermining their legitimacy.

Thirdly, and this is certainly one of the most controversial points for the contemporary Left, Harris is correct to argue that, even in the field of war-making, there has been a decisive change. As he puts it: ‘the systemic drive to auto-destruction appears to have substantially weakened’ (p. 217). The most important reason for this change is that great-power rivalries, at least between the major Western powers and Japan, are no longer being expressed through military competition. This is not simply a function of economic integration, which did not in the past prevent imperial rivalries culminating in the First World War. It is more, Harris suggests, because of overwhelming US military superiority, implicitly accepted by its one-time rivals for global hegemony. Local wars persist, not least in Africa, where Harris ironically suggests that a modern state would be an improvement. We also have the appalling spectacle of the US invasion of Iraq which dictates some qualification to Harris’s argument. Military spending by the US is once again on an upward trajectory. But wars directed against ‘rogue states’ with massive oil reserves are not a function of inter-imperialist rivalries, whatever the tensions generated by US unilateralism.\(^\text{28}\) Indeed, Harris deserves credit for anticipating the difficulties now faced by US troops on the ground and the ‘illusion of military power’, which thinks it can remake Iraq with high-tech weaponry. Defeat for the US, as in Vietnam, may once again force a return to the ‘politics of persuasion and collaboration’ (p. 218). More threatening to the world order, Harris suggests, may be the rivalry of China and India, both powers still ‘committed to the old agenda of the modern state, with insoluble territorial disputes and claims’ (p. 218).

It is possible to defend all these claims and remain, I would argue, on a Marxist terrain. But Harris’s account is seriously weakened by his Panglossian desire to present globalisation in as favourable a light as possible. An adequate critique would require far more detailed attention to his handling of such events as the East-Asian crisis than is possible here. I will, instead, try to match Harris’s penchant for bold assertion by focusing on three issues.

First is a question of agency and of power. Right at the beginning of the book Harris bluntly asserts that ‘There are no lobbies for globalization’. He continues even more

\(^{28}\) For a bit more analysis of debates over this issue, see Green 2002.
surprisingly ‘... there are no significant forces pressing for economic integration. . . . The process is being driven not by conviction but by the forces of the market, shaping all participant organizations in directions which are not clear until well after the event’. If, as he suggests later, Harris is simply challenging a ‘conspiratorial’ view of globalisation, or the claim that the whole process has been dictated by the US state on behalf of its own capitals, then he has a point. But the comments as quoted are, at best, deeply misleading. They are too reminiscent for my taste of the Economist editorials, in which ‘special interests’ lie behind resistance to market reform or protectionism whilst the brave free-trading reformers are merely the bearers of rationality and the common good.

In reality, there have long been many very successful lobbies on behalf of all those capitals which have profited from the opening up of national economies, financial liberalisation, privatisation and, not least, structural adjustment in developing countries. Harris refers to examples such as US pressure for opening up of South Korea to foreign investment or the way in which the governments of first the US and then Britain led the way towards deregulation of financial markets. But the points are made in passing and the question of whose interests those governments might have been representing is never addressed. Of course, as he says, the process has long since acquired a dynamic of its own and, if governments resisted, they paid a price in the failure to retain or attract capital. But the pressures were also mediated through the IMF and World Bank, and, more directly still, by the US Treasury and the EU Commission. All bear some responsibility, for example, along with the rent-seeking mafia types and the legacy of the old order for the disastrous outcomes of ‘big-bang’ liberalisation in the former USSR. Harris is honest and accurate about the consequences of that but resists any suggestion that a different route out of the old highly militarised economy might have been possible.

The second objection relates more directly to Harris’s treatment of the succession of economic crises which characterised the 1990s, most seriously in Eastern Europe but also hitting East Asia in spectacular fashion and continuing to ravage much of Latin America. Harris discusses several of these in detail, although the most recent examples such as Argentina and Bolivia are not mentioned. In each and every case, he highlights the resistance of governments to ‘reform’, or the absence of flexibility in responding to the imperatives of markets and notes accurately how the crises became a vehicle for forcing through change. But this is analogous to attributing slumps in the developed world simply to the competitive weaknesses of the capitals that fail. There will always be some capitals that are less efficient, or in the wrong

29 Investigative journalists are better sources on this than the academic literature (e.g. Palast 2002) but the detailed account of lobbying in Brussels over the single market, the WTO etc. produced by the Corporate Europe Observatory team deserves a special mention (Balanya et al. 2000).

30 He addresses that question more directly in Harris 1997 and in Harris and Lockwood 1997.
sector of the market, and there are always going to be some national economies that are less ‘flexible’. Neither the structural weaknesses, nor the poor steering, of boats that go down in a storm, explains the severity of the storm itself. The deregulation and liberalisation of the global economy, combined with the inherent contradictions of capital accumulation, have generated an increase in global turbulence acknowledged even by a former chief economist at the World Bank.\textsuperscript{31} To invoke Wittgenstein’s metaphor, the winds are blowing more strongly and sometimes they lift the leaves up and sometimes dash them into the ground. Attempting to maintain isolated national economies has become a recipe for stagnation. But opening up to the ravages of the market and unleashing the predatory vultures of global finance has made life significantly worse for many millions of people.

This brings me to the third and most significant objection. Harris somewhat tentatively dips his feet into the debate about globalisation and inequality and concludes that the evidence is ‘miserably inconclusive’ (p. 246). That does not prevent him invoking the notorious World Bank study of Dollar and Kraay which claims that ‘crises do not afflict the poor disproportionately’ (p. 245). That may be true of Argentina, but only because the poorest had little left to lose compared to the workers and small businessmen who saw their savings wiped out and jobs disappear, whilst a tiny elite got their money out hours before the currency collapsed. On one estimate, those in absolute poverty rose from 27\% in 1998 to 53\% in 2002.\textsuperscript{32}

There is a serious argument that the rise in average living standards in China outweighs, in terms of sheer numbers, the deterioration in much of Africa and parts of Latin America and the Middle East. China’s astounding but possibly unsustainable expansion is certainly dependent on an even more rapid growth of exports of manufactures, a transformation of world-historic significance. But a Marxist would emphasise that the worker in a Guangdong factory may well be better off than she was as a peasant yet still be more exploited.

If accelerated globalisation was one response of capital to the economic crises of the 1970s and 1980s, that was only one dimension of a desperate drive to restore profitability through raising the rate of exploitation and scrapping less profitable assets. In their own terms, capitals had some success as the rate of exploitation, however measured, has risen sharply. In the core economies, especially, but no longer exclusively, this has been accompanied by an inflation of the financial sector and a grotesque swelling of luxury consumption by the rich.\textsuperscript{33} We have seen not just new varieties of the rent-seekers singled out by neoliberal economists (those who leech off the state making above-normal profits by obtaining monopoly privileges, arms contracts and protection) but the return of the rentier denounced by Keynes (those who live

\textsuperscript{31} Stiglitz 2002.
\textsuperscript{32} Salama 2002.
\textsuperscript{33} Duménil and Lévy 2004 explore all this in detail.
off interest on government bonds and the proceeds of stock-market speculation). Harris curiously notices the one but not the other.

None of that implies that the world can or should go back to the old order. Marx was scathing about the feudal socialists who waxed sentimentally about mythical medieval harmony. One might say the same of those who hanker for a return to the days when national development and state planning could plausibly but disastrously be identified with socialism. If, as Harris argues, globalisation offers us hope of breaking with the nightmares of nationalism and war, the struggle for human liberation from the anarchy of the market and the despotism of the workplace will remain on the historical agenda.

It is a sad testimony to his loss of conviction in that possibility that Harris takes such a negative attitude towards the movements of global resistance which came to the fore in the protests at the meeting of the WTO in Seattle in 1999. When he writes that the ‘anti-globalisation’ movements unite contradictory elements and lumps in ‘right-wing populists’ such as Pat Buchanan and Sir James Goldsmith with the fighters for global justice such as Arundhati Roy and Walden Bello, he is indulging in an amalgam technique worthy of the Stalinists who denounced the ‘Titoite’ Trotskyists back in 1949. It is vital to oppose protectionism and criticise the advocates of national self-sufficiency, as George Monbiot, for example, has done in his recent book. But that argument will not be won if we stand aside from the real struggles against global capital that are mushrooming across the world. The Bolivian upsurge against privatisation, the battles around access to medicine for HIV in South Africa, the campaign against the Narmada Dam in India so brilliantly described by Roy, the countless unknown struggles of workers everywhere to resist the unrelenting drive of capital to cut costs and drive up profits at their expense, and not least the global movement against the war in Iraq, all represent the future, not the past. By comparison, the NGOs, whose growth, according to Harris, embodies the only hope for a ‘new global civil society’ (p. 228), are simply sticking band-aids onto the gaping wounds.

References


34 Monbiot 2003.
35 Roy 2002.


Evans, Peter et al. (eds.) 1985, *Bringing the State Back In*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.


According to Nigel Harris, capitalism goes back as far as recorded history. ‘Trade... has a stronger claim to being the essence of capitalism than any other activity’ (p. 9).

Trade is primeval. So is capitalism. ‘The class of “businessmen”... has normally been cosmopolitan’, desiring free enterprise, free trade, free roaming across the earth’s surface. This class has an emancipatory bent, ‘intrinsically subversive in terms of the state agenda’ (though, being ‘also pragmatic’, it has, again and again, compacted with state protection, patronage and monopoly [p.15]). Rather as William Morris was nostalgic for the medieval craft-worker, Harris is nostalgic for the globetrotting long-distance merchant of medieval and earlier times.

The European-born modern capitalism of the last few hundred years is special not for being capitalist, but for harnessing capitalism to the ‘state agenda’. What was special, and what Europe then spread to the rest of the world, was a long-lasting system of warring states in which each state tightly shaped its own society – rather than loosely latching onto it, as in older, more diffuse, systems of governance – and pumped up its own capitalist national economy in order to gain the means for war.

‘One logic, that of the state, the territorial ruler, came to subordinate and completely reshape the other, that of capital’. With the rise of military technology and the increasing expense of war, ‘princes acquired an interest in promoting capitalism and, to ensure its growth, often invented a class of national capitalists, a client instrument... [thus] a system of warring national economies or of national capitalisms’ (pp. 48, 52). Not capitalist states, but statist capital, a world order ‘of competing states driven by the imperative of military defence and of warfare – at a minimum, the defence of national independence’ (p. 50).

What is new today is that the capital that developed within that order of warring states is acquiring enough momentum to assert its own inner drives, beginning to overwhelm the state order and creating for the first time ‘a “capitalist society” [with] a sense of permanency and self-perpetuation’ (p. 14).

Gradually, and with many impasses and setbacks, capital is making the world more cosmopolitan, loosening national government into ‘an immense network of dense regulation’ (p. 219), driving ‘step[s] towards rethinking the role of the state in terms of popular welfare rather than economic nationalism’ (p. 204), and opening the way...
towards international disarmament (p.188). ‘Compared to the old order of the first half of the twentieth century, what is coming about is strikingly superior to what went before’ (p. 6).

Harris challenges our estimates not only of what has been, what is, and what is becoming, but also of who might act to make it better. Privatisation, for him, signifies not vice but ‘a full assault on the war-making state and its capital project’ (p. 130). ‘The unions . . . are the product of the old statist economy, and are declining with it’. It is ‘the best unions’ (and not, as we might think, the worst) that ‘try to recycle themselves as personal-service organisations rather than collective bargainers, as proto-NGOs’ (p. 231). It is NGOs that may ‘embody an emerging popular conscience’ (p. 232).

This is a star turn pour épater les prolétaires, a suavely sustained challenge to the commonly taken for granted ideas of the socialist and Marxist movement in which Nigel Harris had his intellectual roots.

It could be swatted aside. How can Harris argue that cosmopolitan capital is pushing towards a world without war, when George W. Bush has proclaimed infinite pre-emptive war? How can he so blithely amortise his observation that ‘poverty has increased [and] income inequality has increased in the developed countries and between countries’ with the comment that ‘the links to globalization – increased trade and capital movements – are not at all clear’ (p. 246)?

Of course, countries and regions that have increased their exports, or attracted large inflows of capital, have seen average incomes rise. But it is not new for capitalism to grow. It grew faster, in most areas, before the current ultra-cosmopolitan phase. And the overall logic of ‘globalised’ capitalism is for the regions of growth to develop among tracts of pauperisation and amid increased global inequalities.

But let us look at the basics. It must be a central part of Harris’s story that the European war-making state, with capital built up and shaped within its limits, had, for a certain epoch of history, a competitive advantage enabling it to dominate the whole world and stamp its template on it. Paradoxically, Harris inverts the usual story whereby industrial first-comers (Britain) could develop in a relatively unstatified manner, whereas countries catching up required heavy state initiative. For him, it was a particularly intense form of statification within Europe – a long-term system of warring states – which pushed capitalism from its earlier to its modern forms. Once capital reached its modern forms, it became largely an error for ex-colonial states in the late twentieth century to copy that European model.

It is not clear to me exactly how, in his own terms, Harris explains the competitive advantage of the European war-making states in the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries over the not-so-bellicose states of Asia, which at the time were as advanced or more so, both economically and culturally. In general, he accepts the liberal view that capital prospers best when the state interferes least. Just as capital is ‘subversive’ for the ‘state agenda’, so also the state agenda is subversive for capital.
The war-making state’s controls on trade, and its military expenses, were an economic drain. It could and did nurture some capitalists through military contracts and trade monopolies. But, in Harris’s logic, that would surely have been at the expense of other capitalists, and, ultimately, of overall growth.

For Marx, the new factor in sixteenth-century Europe was a new mode of production, a new prevalent method by which the surplus product was extracted from the direct producers; a new mode which, in turn, generated new principal social classes, new norms, and a new dynamism of technological and economic growth.

In Marx’s account, the state could promote a new mode of production by forcibly pushing people into wage-labour, by forcibly concentrating wealth otherwise dispersed in smaller non-capitalist stashes into the hands of those who would use it as capital, and by harnessing or supplementing market forces to add a compulsion and urgency greater than that of spontaneous trade impulses (often trammelled by custom and poor communications) to the characteristically capitalist drive to revolutionise production.

While for centuries merchants could do business by making accommodations with princes – at the same time as they constructed their own networks cutting across the princes’ borders – with the emergence of a fully-developed capitalist mode of production this ceases to be true. The large capitalist enterprise must interact with states at a thousand points. Its headquarters must be embedded in a specific framework of law, market regulation, and physical and human infrastructure.

A hundred threads of personal connection and lobbyist interest tie its top management to the public authorities, and, almost invariably, to one particular state.

Such an account of the interaction between capital and nation-states is ruled out for Harris by his axiom of trade as the essence of capitalism. It leaves him, I think, with no convincing way to explain why the European war-making states could outstrip the relatively pacific empires of the East, or why the latter were not spurred into assuming an equivalent war-making shape.

It also leads Harris astray into thinking that today’s replacement of integrated-national-industrial-complex states by world-market states signals the beginning of the state withering away altogether. Transnational corporations today relate to many states, though most have a definite home state. But they certainly relate to states, structured in a world-market system regulated by consortia of states (G8, IMF, WTO, EU, etc.) and whose cornerstone is one particular state (the USA). Capital needs states to regulate its social, legal, and infrastructural conditions, and probably interacts them with them more closely than ever before, albeit differently.

It is an axiom for Harris that ‘trade’ is ‘the essence of capitalism’, but he does not systematically confront the alternative idea that this essence is a mode of production, or Marx’s argument that merchant capital and usurer’s capital could and did exist for vast periods of time before capitalism proper without generating a capitalist mode of production.
In his preface, Harris explains his position as in part ‘stretch[ing] the insight in the opposite direction, to cover the entire history of the modern state and of national capitalism’, in contrast to the ‘permanent arms economy’ thesis advocated by the Marxist current to which he formerly adhered, the IS/SWP (p. viii). But, just as the argument that the ‘permanent arms economy’ explained the unprecedented expansion of surplus-value after World War Two never answered the objection that, whatever ingenious calculations one might carry out regarding the transformation of values into prices, arms spending consumed surplus-value rather than expanding it, so Harris’s new argument is not a satisfactory explanation of why European states ‘boomed’ from the sixteenth century onwards.

The flanking pillars of the ‘permanent arms economy’ in what was IS/SWP theory in Harris’s day – Tony Cliff’s peculiar version of the thesis that the USSR was state-capitalist, and the idea that imperialism had been the ‘highest stage but one’ of capitalism – also have traceable, though sometimes inverted, extrapolations in Harris’s new argument.

According to the 1960s IS/SWP, imperialism was a bygone stage because it had been about excess funds from the glutted economies of the advanced countries becoming capital exported to the colonies. With the ‘permanent arms economy’, those excess funds went to the military instead. The ex-colonies were bereft, left in involuntary isolation, condemned to painful and largely hopeless state-driven attempts to raise themselves by their own economic bootstraps.

By the time that picture of the world had been clearly formulated, its falsity was already becoming evident. Many ex-colonies were creating conditions for capital accumulation, and drawing in global funds. But the old picture reappears in Harris’s new argument, not so much as a stage in metropolitan-driven world development but as an error on the part of the governments of newly-independent countries, dazzled by the centuries-old European model of development.

Unlike all other theorists of the USSR as state-capitalist, who would make good or bad efforts to demonstrate the thesis in terms of the mode of production or of trade, Cliff argued that the USSR was state-capitalist because of the all-shaping pressure on it of international military competition.

With Harris, we have the same argument of the all-shaping effect of international military competition, now extrapolated backwards over centuries. In a curious inversion, military competition still defines the competing states, but now as not-capitalist rather than, as with Cliff, as capitalist.

Cliff’s original argument was embedded in a perspective by no means idiosyncratically his, that capitalism was, in any case, inexorably becoming more and more state-clustered.※

※ Cliff 1974, p. 212.
The last twenty-odd years prove it was not so. Some species of close connection between the state and capital is still operating, but capital is not moving towards ever greater clustering in relatively integrated state-centred complexes. In the 1940s, all the essential dynamics of capital had not in fact become subsumed into the processes of international military competition. Capital had other dynamics, different from the demands of military competition between states, and developed and promoted through trade.

Rebounding from the view he once shared of capitalist dynamics – as becoming essentially identical with the dynamics of military competition between states, once these were sufficiently advanced – Harris has now ventured to the opposite pole. The dynamics of military competition clash with the dynamics of capitalism, despite compromise and collaboration in particular times and places. Globalisation signifies capital developing far enough that the dynamics and imperatives of trade can begin to overwhelm the dynamics of military competition.

Even more than might be inevitable in a book covering so wide a terrain, Harris relies for evidence for his assertions on clipped-out summary sentences from other authors, many of which cannot stand as solid evidence for anything.

A first example: Harris argues that the nineteenth-century order of warring states in Europe corralled people into loyalty to authority (the state) where previously they ‘had . . . regarded [their] rulers with fear, not to say terror’ (p. 76). And as evidence he cites Josef Schumpeter writing: ‘At the time of the Boer War there was not a beggar [in London] . . . who did not speak of “our” rebellious subjects’ (p. 77).

That was Schumpeter writing twenty-five years later. At the time of the Boer War he had been a sixteen- to nineteen-year-old student in Austria. What did he know of the thinking of London beggars? In fact, whatever beggars said to the prosperous gentlemen from whom they sought alms, both organised workers and a large section of British bourgeois opinion reacted to the Boer War not just with weariness and fear (as in previous epochs) but with conscious political opposition to it as ‘imperialist’.

To argue that enthusiasm for authority is an artefact of the modern nation-state defies much evidence. Take, for example, Norman Cohn’s description of the way the first Crusades ‘intoxicated the masses of the poor’ in a Europe well before the modern state-system, and inspired them to huge ‘massacres of the infidel’.37 When the rage which surely always simmered beneath the masses’ deference and reverence to lord, priest and emperor exploded in open revolt, it was usually under the leadership of a supposed ‘lost’ hierarch who would now oust the usurper, as in the archetypal story of Pseudo-Baldwin, who briefly made himself a European leader in 1224–5 by convincing the masses that he was the lost Emperor of Constantinople.

The consolidation of the modern nation-state, by contrast, went together with the emergence of currents of thought, and eventually movements, built around conscious schemes for how the people themselves, not some sleeping emperor, could make a more just and peaceful society.

Harris inverts the schematic-Marxist idea according to which the bourgeois revolutions of earlier modern capitalism were progressive, but the mature bourgeoisie brings regression. For him, the inauguration of modern capitalism (in seventeenth-century Europe, on his dating), and of the ‘prototype of warring state . . . founded upon the idea of a popular war’ by the Dutch, English and American revolutions took humanity into a tunnel of blind bellicose nationalism (pp. 64–79). Only now has the bourgeoisie become strong enough to be decisively progressive and drag us out again into the light that once shone over the wandering merchants of pre-modern times.

Second example: to sustain the argument that war-making shaped everything in the modern state, Harris quotes Alan Milward, according to whom ‘what emerged’ in Britain in World War Two, ‘was almost as far from democracy as the government of Germany or Italy’ (p. 118). Such a sentence can hardly outweigh the obvious difference between a Britain where strikes, opposition speeches, contested elections, and Trotskyist newspapers continued with minor harassment, on the one hand, and Nazi Germany, on the other.

Downplaying its exceptionalness, Harris uses Nazi Germany as the epitome of the modern state, a fusion and concentration of the essential traits of two archetypes, Frederick the Great’s Prussia and Napoleon’s France. In his view, Nazi Germany is the case that ‘tests to the limits the thesis that capitalism as a system . . . controlled the state, that Germany was in any sense a “capitalist state”’ (p. 109). Hitler was able to overrule capitalists whenever they tried to rein him in, for example in his drive for autarchy. Germany was not a capitalist state. It was a war-making state.

So Hitler’s overruling of the chief personal representatives of capitalism disproves the thesis that ‘capitalism as a system . . . controlled the state’? But Hitler also overruled the chief personal representatives of war-making, the army top brass. Many of them opposed Hitler at critical points – maybe more of them, and more boldly, than businessmen did. They failed too. If the evidence proves that Nazi Germany was not a capitalist state, then it was also not a military state.

It was Hitler’s personal dictatorship. Even bourgeois-democratic states whose capitalist character can be argued in the simplest terms of personal connections of (and lobbyist influence on) state personnel, significantly depend for their course on individual leaders (Thatcher, Bush). Those leaders are not just ventriloquists’ dummies for a conclave of top capitalists placed just behind the scenes.

Any materialist theory will argue that the choice of leader, the leader’s perception of possible options, and so on, are all shaped by broader material circumstances. ‘Extreme’ leaders arise when powerful interests sense an impasse, feel a need to
abridge normal consensual methods, and give a free hand to forces willing and able to act drastically, even if maybe this drastic action will not be exactly to their tastes (because those forces have been shaped by a multitude of circumstances, not just the top classes – for example, by the ‘petty bourgeoisie run amok’ in Germany).

Arguing that modern European states were and are capitalist states, we point to the capitalists’ power in society and to the close personal connection in normal times between rulers and capitalists. The economic system has structural constraints which make the state ‘capitalist’, but not automatically, not without human agency. We recognise capitalist states where the ruling group is sharply separate from the capitalist class but explain them as aberrations generated by peculiar social or historical tensions, and generally unstable.

Harris’s seems to be a theory with structural imperatives but no clear agency. Who is the actor of what he calls ‘the state agenda’? If what we call a modern capitalist state was and is in fact a ‘war state’ (p. 74), who were and are the active agents of the war imperative? It seems to me that Harris should show that, in normal times, states have been run by top military people or their close proxies or associates, and that exceptional cases of clearly civilian rule are generated by peculiar tensions yet remain decisively constrained by the structural imperatives of the general system of warring states. He does not do so.

Harris makes Frederick the Great, Napoleon, and Hitler the normal cases that establish the general law of the modern state system, while others are exceptions which we can discount. Why? He himself concedes that Prussian militarism ‘did not have the same [capital-stimulating] effects as occurred in Britain and France’ (p. 66) and that Napoleon left France with its ‘development retarded for long into the future’ (p. 74).

Britain and the USA were more successful states, more obviously ‘capitalist’ and less militarised, although, of course, they waged wars. The USA has never been involved in total war. The nearest it got was its own civil war. World Wars One and Two engulfed its society much less than those of other states.

Today, even under George W. Bush, US casualties in Iraq are tiny compared to those of previous wars. Within a matter of months, Bush’s occupation of Iraq led a large section of the population to question the whole project. Despite its panoply of ‘smart’ death-machines, the USA, by broad historical standards, is not a highly war-geared society. Yet it has a far better claim to be considered the standard for a successful industrial-capitalist order than Prussia or France.

Hitler’s ‘twin star’, Stalin, less cited by Harris, also disturbs his thesis. Stalin constructed a heavily militarised state. He was also able to purge most of his top generals, in 1937. The essentials of the Stalinist structure would later be replicated in many other states far less heavily militarised.

One of the most surprising things about the post-Stalinist states in the ex-USSR and Eastern Europe is how quietly the military have accepted being cut down. In 1989–91,
there was good reason to see military dictatorships as the most likely medium-term prospect in those states. With the implosion of the old ruling parties, which had systematically stifled all political alternatives, the military was the only cohesive institution around which to build a new order. Yet that is not what happened.

World-wide and historically, military dictatorships have for the most part not simply involved the existing army high command directly taking that governmental power which, following Harris’s thesis, they already dominated indirectly. Often, they have been created by groups of officers, sometimes well below the top ranks, making an essentially political coup and then subordinating the old top military command as well as the governmental power to themselves.

The historical evidence is that the military establishment has generally been a specialised appendage of the capitalist class, rather than a possible agency for a contrary historical-structural imperative.

Harris ‘stretches’ backwards, over a vast sweep of history, extrapolations from one clear fact of the last twenty years: the move of capital away from the state-clustering that Marxist (and other) conventional wisdom had reckoned as its inexorable tendency. Reject Harris’s wholesale inversion of Marxist conventional wisdom, and we are still left with the question of what we should correct from the old schemes.

Engels wrote in *Anti-Dühring*:

> This rebellion of the productive forces, as they grow more and more powerful, against their quality as capital . . . forces the capitalist class itself to treat them more and more as social productive forces, so far as this is possible under capitalist conditions . . . that form of the socialisation of great masses of means of production which we meet in the different kinds of joint stock companies. . . . At a further stage . . . the official representative of capitalist society – the state – will ultimately have to undertake the direction of production. . . . All the social functions of the capitalist are now performed by salaried employees. The capitalist has no further social function than . . . gambling on the Stock Exchange.\(^\text{38}\)

Events in the next decades confirmed Engels’s predictions (and still do, up to a point). So, to Kautsky, Luxemburg, Hilferding, Lenin, Bukharin and other Marxists of the next generation, it seemed straightforward to read off the increasing ‘organisation’ of capitalism into state-centred clusters at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth (statism, militarism, regulation, protectionism, managerialism, bureaucratisation) as a direct product of the rise of monopoly capital and finance capital.

A hundred years later, we have vaster-than-ever corporations, and vaster-than-ever finance capital – with states fanatically deregulating, privatising, and free-trading,

and shareholders sometimes brusquely sacking managers or decimating managerial hierarchies. The relation between state-centred clusters, on the one hand, and monopoly and finance capital, on the other, is more complicated than it seemed.

The rise of oligopolo-financial capital surely required the ‘organisation’ of the capitalist world in one way or another. We now know that ‘organisation’ through a more-or-less free-trade world, regulated by cartels of leading states – with each individual state regulating its own economy in order to best to integrate it into the world market – is an option.

However, it was not an option in the late nineteenth century. Then, the rising capitalist powers faced incumbent leading states which had large colonial empires (the Netherlands, France, Russia, Austria, Spain, Portugal, Britain). Those empires were expanding, even in the heyday of the ‘imperialism of free trade’ (settler dynamics in Australia and Canada; the desire to clinch sources of revenue, and lack of available docile local bourgeois régimes that would guarantee integration of territories into world free trade). The choice for the rising powers was either to jump in and grab something for themselves, or be shut out. They jumped in. Each state strove to organise its own integrated industrial-military complex, in order to hold its own in the high-imperialist world.

Other options began to emerge – and to be pushed forward for consideration by the liberation struggles of the colonised peoples – after 1945. What evolved in the Western side of the Cold War was something more like a cartel-organised ‘imperialism of free trade’ than the old high imperialism.

In the early stages of enforcing mass proletarianisation, concentrating funds, and applying pressure for innovation (which relatively sparse, localised or custom-bound markets cannot do), excessive statism can help capitalist development, or at least bring benefits for it comparable with its costs. But beyond those stages, the hypertrophied state stifles capitalist development.

It clogs up change, inhibits innovation, sucks resources into bureaucratic waste. As Marx wrote:

> The rate of profit . . . is particularly important for all new offshoots of capital that organise themselves independently. And if formation of capital were to fall exclusively into the hands of a few existing big capitals, for whom the mass of profit outweighs the rate, the animating fire of production would be totally extinguished.39

That happened on the hyper-statist, Stalinist side of the Cold War divide. On the other (moderately statist) side, the gradual globalisation of markets generated an apparent paradox which we see in full flower today: the simultaneous intensification of both

---

oligopoly and competition.\textsuperscript{40} We also witness the simultaneous strengthening of states – their resilience and elasticity, their ability to drive through measures contrary to the perceived immediate interests of very large numbers of their citizens – and of their adaptation to the world market, together with their ability to collaborate with other states in an increasingly dense web of international institutions and agencies.

With these combinations, the inbuilt tendencies of capital, both constructive and destructive, have been able to work themselves out with great vigour – creating vast new swathes of capitalist enterprise whilst pauperising whole populations.

Harris argues that the hard edges of state authority are being blurred into a web of ‘governance’ increasingly dense both at ‘supranational’ and ‘subnational’ level. This is true. But four qualifications need to be made, and they undermine Harris’s sanguine deductions.

First, as a more prudent advocate of the same thesis of governance puts it, ‘sovereign states... are still by far the most potent distillations of economic and political power in the modern world’.\textsuperscript{41} What is more, their power to impose – against their own populations – privatisations, deregulations, and tax changes that degrade social conditions and increase inequality and insecurity, but are suitable to world-market integration, is indispensable to the new order. This order is statist. A different sort of statism, but statism nonetheless.

Second, Scott should have written ‘economic, political and military power’, not just ‘economic and political power’.

Third, that though, for the last decade and the foreseeable future, the web of collaboration has been dominant, there are conflicts and clashes between the big capitalist state centres. The possibility of them tearing apart the web of collaboration abides.

Fourth, that the hyper-supremacy of the USA is probably decisive in maintaining the web of collaboration. No other state can foreseeably hope to match it; every other state, therefore, is better off participating in the web of collaboration, on terms which it knows are biased by US supremacy, than cutting away. The rallying of Britain, Italy, Spain and the Netherlands to the USA over Iraq shows how very far the European Union is from rivalling the USA as a central node in the web.

And with the hyper-supremacy of the USA goes the role of the USA as ‘globocop’, policing the world order. The USA’s wars in the Gulf (1991 and 2003), Kosovo (1999) and Afghanistan (2001) are not throwbacks, or products of the residues of dwindling old structures. They are twenty-first century wars.

Also twenty-first century are the Taliban’s takeover of Afghanistan, Al Qaeda’s war for the illusory aim of re-establishing an Islamic empire, and episodes like Saddam

\textsuperscript{40} Semmler 1982.
\textsuperscript{41} Scott 1998, p. 139.
Hussein’s invasions of Iran and Kuwait: opportunist grabs by regional powers on the edges of the US-policing world order, and reactionary backlashes generated by the arrogance of that world order and the hollowing-out of local secular, forward-looking, bourgeois populisms.

In short, cosmopolitan capital is indeed flourishing: but it does not annul states, wars, pauperisation or inequality.

Harris’s hope for progress brought by cosmopolitan capital is not just the offspring of a satisfaction with the status quo. It is also the flipside of a loss of hope for the workers’ movement. If Harris is wrong about capital, but right about the irremediable decline of the workers’ movement, maybe the essence of his conclusions still stands: all we can do is try to accentuate the liberalising, opening-out tendencies of cosmopolitan capital, and limit its horrors by such means as are available, mainly the lobbying of NGOs.

Harris leaves as a bald assertion his statement that ‘the unions... are the product of the old statist economy, and are declining with it’. Worldwide, there are probably more workers organised in genuine trade unions (not the state-run ‘trade unions’ typical of the Stalinist states) than at any time before 1989. But let us examine the strongest case that can be made for Harris’s thesis, the one exemplified by France over the last eight years or so.

The mass strike movements of 1995 and 2003 in France were larger – in terms of numbers of workers actively involved in durably organising and extending the struggle – than those of May–June 1968. Larger, also, in terms of numbers of workers mobilised on street demonstrations.

Yet trade-union membership continues to stagnate. It is below 10 per cent overall, only 5 per cent in the private sector. The Trotskyist Left has won some good election results and new recruits. But the activist strength of the radical Left, as well as of the mass labour movement, remains smaller than it was in the period immediately following 1968.

We see a working class still existing, still capable of waging very large struggles – but diminished in its capacity to organise continuously and massively for positive social changes and to define their direction.

Why? In the first place, the terrain for trade unionism has grown more difficult. Back in 1938, Leon Trotsky considered it an inevitable consequence of capitalist social structure that trade unions could reach no more than about 20 to 25 per cent of the working class, mainly among the more skilled and better-paid.

Between the 1940s and 1980s, we became accustomed to considering much higher levels of unionisation as normal. What had changed? Primarily war, and the inertia of institutions established during the War or soon thereafter. The previous big upturn in trade-union numbers had come primarily around World War One. In 1912, even Britain, ‘the classic country of trade unionism’, had only 2.2 million trade-union
members. The German working class, famously the world’s best organised, had 1.8 million unionists.

Industry-wide or nationwide collective bargaining was not primarily something won by working-class struggles. Generally, it was something instituted in wartime, persisting for a long time after the wars.

In wartime, market competition between capitalists is at a minimum, and markets are tight. It is in the collective interest of the capitalist class to institute some national system of wage regulation, for, if bargaining is left to individual capitalist units, the result will be a leapfrogging of wage rises.

In conditions where competition remains limited, markets relatively safe, and unemployment low, it makes good sense for capitalists to continue that collective bargaining.

When competition sharpens, the calculus changes. All capitalists are under great competitive pressure to cut costs. Fail to cut costs, and they lose their markets. Each capitalist unit must be free to respond to its own conditions of competition. Sometimes it will make competitive sense for a capitalist to pay a big wage rise. But she will want to do that only if it makes sense in terms of the conditions of her unit and her sector, not if it is just a flow-on from a much broader system of bargaining.

The intensification of capitalist competition, the worldwide slide into ‘ruinous competition’ chronicled and discussed by Robert Brenner, thus creates a strong pressure against the large-scale collective bargaining and processes of cautiously-adjusted compromise on which reformist trade unionism thrives.

I do not believe that the slide into ‘ruinous competition’ explains all the things Brenner claims it explains. But certainly it implies a greater capitalist incentive to fragment bargaining.

It is therefore worthwhile for capitalists to make the extra effort, and devote the extra resources, to unit-by-unit bargaining. Government departments simulate or artificially evoke competition in order not to be left behind in the push to limit costs.

This means harder struggles, and worse consequences for working-class defeat. It does not mean necessarily an organic weakening of working-class capacity. On the contrary, one implication of increased competition and tighter supply chains is that at least some sections of workers have more economic power than ever before (and, therefore, that the employers are more anxious to fragment them).

An easy return to the days of majority trade unionism is unlikely. And the changed structure also implies that a higher political temperature of ignition is needed for large working-class struggles to develop and win.

Simultaneously, however, the old anticapitalist political culture of the working class has been imploding, with the débâcle and discrediting of Stalinism. This hits particularly hard in France, where, for decades, Communist Party members were the activist backbone of the labour movement. The moral and political collapse of the Communist
Party has proceeded faster than impulses towards revival emerging from the recent struggles.

Almost everywhere, the old Stalinist parties have collapsed or withered. The social-democratic parties continue, but in a much more bourgeoisified, bureaucratised form. Those old parties have been ‘exposed’, as we so hoped they would be between the 1930s and 1970s. But the ‘exposure’ has not worked in favour of their mass activist bases tidily switching over to Marxist politics. It came in the course of the working-class defeats and disillusionments of the late 1970s and early 1980s, and led to a clearing of the ground for the rise of authentic communist politics, but did so by way of the erosion and dissipation of the old generation. There are a lot of political corpses around, and the noxious fumes of the political plagues that struck them down still poison the terrain.

With the emergence of a new radical generation through the recent anticapitalist and antiracist movements, and the growth of new workers’ movements in Indonesia, China, Korea and many other countries, the basis for revival is being laid.

But thinking through the strongest case that can be made for Harris’s thesis should warn us against too simplistic a view of such a revival. It is very unlikely that it will simply float the Left and the labour movement back up to where we were, in Western Europe, in the 1970s, and then let us proceed from there without making the mistakes we made then. The history that turned into dark farce in the 1980s will not be repeated as light comedy tomorrow.

Reborn working-class socialism will be different from the dominant left culture of the 1970s. Today it has to be a strictly capitalist anticapitalism, so to speak: one exclusively based on contradictions, tendencies, ‘new passions and forces’ generated within capitalism itself. In the era of ‘organised capitalism’ its statist tendencies appeared to demonstrate the imminence of socialist society. With hindsight, they appear shaped more by contingencies.

There is a quasi-fractal character about the contradictions of capitalism: they operate, with some similarities of structure, both at the global level exemplified by the activities of the IMF and the multinationals, and at the ‘germ-cell’ level of the commodity.

A similar point may be made about today’s new radicalism. The individual in rebellion against capital at all levels, from the IMF down to the fast-food french-fries portion, faces a kaleidoscopic reality, and the response is kaleidoscopic too.

Marx wrote in *The Communist Manifesto* that communism was ‘a spectre haunting Europe’. Today’s quasi-fractal reality, the curious contradiction between mass diffuse anticapitalist sentiment and the continuing weakness of organised labour movements, reprises that spectrality. With hindsight, the Communist League, with its Marxian ideas, appears to us as the core and pivot of the communist ‘movement of movements’ of the late 1840s. But only with hindsight. That appearance-from-hindsight would not have been available until about forty years later.
If this is right, the main conclusion for radical activists would consist in the centrality of regenerating working-class socialist culture and politics. We think – or used to think, anyway – that, just around the corner, there is a new burst of strike or demonstration activity that will, at least, bring the condition of the Left and the labour movement back to what it was in the 1970s, so that we can continue the efforts interrupted by the defeats of the 1980s. But that is an illusion.

Working-class regeneration in the era of cosmopolitan capital is no illusion. But it will not come by remaking a bygone epoch.

References
The Incomplete Projects: Marxism, Modernity and the Politics of Culture
CARL FREEDMAN
Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2002

Reviewed by MARK BOULD

In the closing pages of this volume, Freedman offers a moving portrait of George Orwell as a man who, unwavering in his belief that socialism was the desirable alternative to barbarism, doubted, especially in his final years, that a socialist future was possible. This foreboding, evident in Nineteen Eighty-Four (1949), might be seen as a refraction of the international situation at the time of the novel’s composition. Freedman, however, relates it to Orwell’s conflicted class position – his simultaneous contempt for the middle-class socialist and patronising admiration for the working-class socialist – and his distrust of theory: only when Orwell was ‘actively a partisan in the concrete union of socialist practice and theory that was the Spanish revolution’ was he ‘able somewhat to transcend his individualistic dilemma’ (p. 185).

The essay from which the above observations are drawn was one of the first that Freedman published (some twenty years ago), but these early thoughts about the contradictory position and role of the Marxist intellectual (especially when also a professional intellectual), can be seen to shape, or perhaps haunt, much of his subsequent work. The Incomplete Projects collects seven essays, revised to varying extents: the earliest two, on Nineteen Eighty-Four and the science fiction (sf) novels of Philip K. Dick, are from 1984; four are from 1990–1; and one is from 1998. Their subjects include the 1968 novel MASH and its film and TV adaptations; the TV series Upstairs Downstairs (1970–5) and the film A Room with a View (James Ivory, 1985); Stanley Kubrick’s film 2001: A Space Odyssey (1968); Robert Penn Warren’s novel All the King’s Men (1946); and Dashiell Hammett’s novel Red Harvest (1929). They are taken from the journals Cultural Critique, Modern Fiction Studies, PMLA, Science-Fiction Studies and The Southern Review, and from Jefferson Humphries’s Southern Literature and Literary Theory collection. Two of them won awards. This ‘professional intellectual’ range of texts and venues might seem, at first glance, to constitute a rather disparate grab-bag connected by nothing more than the fact that Freedman at some point wrote about

---

1 It is developed from the final chapter of his PhD thesis. See Freedman 1988.
2 The Margaret Church Memorial Prize for the essay on Nineteen Eighty-Four; the Science Fiction Research Association’s Pioneer Award for Excellence in Scholarship for the essay on 2001.
Probably even rarer is a preface which begins ‘The purpose of this volume is to affirm the continuing validity – and indeed primacy – of Marxism as a method of social analysis, and to offer several examples of the Marxist analysis of modern culture. It seems to me a good idea to be, at the outset, as blunt as possible about my general orientation. I am not a “neo-Marxist” or a “near-Marxist” and still less a “post-Marxist;” nor am I a Marxologist,” nor do I write as one “influenced by” Marxism or “sympathetic to” Marxism. I am a Marxist (p. xi).

or for them (which is not necessarily a bad thing); moreover, such a retrospective gathering lends the essays an aura of belatedness. However, collected together in book form, where it is possible to flip back and forth, to read them in various orders, one can detect complex connections between them (of some of which the author does not seem to be aware), trace ideas as they emerge, are revisited and rethought and reworked: one can trace the outlines of a project, as yet incomplete. And that project, to which Freedman has remained faithful through a quarter century of post-thisism and post-thatism, often reads like a homecoming: it is *heimlich*; it is hopeful. It is work still to be done.

Although each of the essays in the book is imbued with a thoroughgoing and nuanced Marxist understanding, it is in ‘The Situation of Modernity and the Crisis of Political Thinking’, Freedman’s elegant and succinct introductory essay that he sets out his stall as a ‘Marxist intellectual’. He begins with a straightforward account of Marx’s critique of capital, insisting on its cogency and necessity, and dismissing the frequently-heard ‘condescending platitude which allows that Marx may have accurately described the “Dickensian” capitalism of the nineteenth century, but that his writings are inadequate to the quite different capitalism of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries’; such bromides are part of the ‘gross stupidity’ and ‘basic textual ignorance’ typical of discussion of Marx in ‘supposedly reputable intellectual forums’ (p. 7). While such comment is not uncommon in Marxist circles, that it should appear in a book from a university press intended to be indexed under cultural studies/popular culture is rather remarkable. The importance of such an intervention is evident when one considers the current state of cultural studies and the study of popular culture:

I do not know that anyone has ever exactly said that (for example) the music we listen to and the positions in which we prefer to have sexual intercourse are more interesting and more fundamental to our social being than our place in the overall relations of economic production; but (as Terry Eagleton has often pointed out) this is the *kind* of assumption to which many (by no means all) practitioners of cultural studies seem to incline. (p. 36; italics in original.)

At the end of a decade or more in which cultural studies has seen ‘the turn to Gramsci’ and notions of hegemony frequently reduced to often naïve celebrations of the everyday and the marginal as sites of resistance (with a belated scientistic turn to (often pseudo-) ethnography to shore up the edifice), it is refreshing to find a book

---

3 Probably even rarer is a preface which begins ‘The purpose of this volume is to affirm the continuing validity – and indeed primacy – of Marxism as a method of social analysis, and to offer several examples of the Marxist analysis of modern culture. It seems to me a good idea to be, at the outset, as blunt as possible about my general orientation. I am not a “neo-Marxist” or a “near-Marxist” and still less a “post-Marxist;” nor am I a Marxologist,” nor do I write as one “influenced by” Marxism or “sympathetic to” Marxism. I am a Marxist (p. xi).
This caricature of cultural studies is by no means a straw-man. When I described Freedman's work to a colleague, I was told it sounded very old-fashioned. Leaving aside the implication that criticism should be governed by fashion, I quipped that Freedman's essays were instances of marginalised resistance, transgressing and subverting the discipline's dominant norms. My colleague's response was, to say the least, humourless.

This model dovetails, although I suspect not always tidily, with the dialectic of the modern and the pre-modern outlined in Freedman 2000.

Freedman's introductory essay begins by sketching in the two major lines of Marxist theoretical work: classical Marxism and Western Marxism. The former, despite its achievements in economic, political and historical analysis, has in terms of political strategy demonstrated a 'persistent tendency toward wishful thinking' (p. 15). The latter, despite its achievements in philosophy and aesthetics, has rarely engaged with political strategy. This is not to say that 'socialist prospects would be sunnier today if only Trotsky had not been so incurably hopeful, or if only Lukács had spent less time thinking about Balzac and more time thinking about general strikes' (p. 16). However, it does once more point to a dilemma akin to that faced by Orwell: Freedman's own thinking is indebted to both these lines of descent and is desirous of a praxis that will bridge their concerns while moving beyond merely interpreting the world.

Freedman suggests that, in order to begin to think politically as Marxists today, we need a clear comprehension of what is meant by 'today'; we need to comprehend modernity. This requires us to move beyond the Marxist analysis of capital and class which is 'unproblematically adequate to the economic dimension of modernity' and to attempt to find out 'if there is some principle that structures cultural modernity in a way at least roughly analogous to the structuring of economic modernity by capitalism' (p. 18). He begins with Habermas's 'Modernity – An Incomplete Project' (1985), which describes the Enlightenment as embodying a twofold project: the secular and rational development of science, ethics and the arts which tended towards specialisation, and 'a contrasting impulse toward radical democracy' (pp. 18–19). The 'real telos of reason
The poetry of William Blake – a 'dialectical combination of the most radically progressive elements in both Romanticism and Enlightenment' (p. 25) – is cited as exemplary.

What Freedman draws from Habermas is the sense that, although the Enlightenment’s subject-centred reason might indeed have led to the death camps, its communicative reason might also lead to radical democracy. To demonstrate what is at stake, he adopts Brechtian crude-thinking to ask whether the wage-relation – capitalism itself – is a good or bad thing; and answers by reminding us of all the things it swept away (slavery, feudalism, various mystifications) even as it produced exploitative and immiserating wage-slavery. Therefore, capitalism and Enlightenment can be understood as homologous (although not symmetrical); but homology is not the only relationship between them. While capitalism requires the secular rationality unleashed by Enlightenment, capitalism itself is profoundly irrational. Moreover, by reducing rationality to instrumentalism, it fosters the irrationality of the counter-Enlightenment. (This is exemplified, Freedman suggests, by the discrepancy between the economic development of the USA and its 'cultural regression . . . mired in a network of theological superstitions and bigotries'; indeed, 'on issue after issue . . . the heirs of Jefferson and Tom Paine are now struggling, and generally with little success, to drag America kicking and screaming into the eighteenth century – forward into the eighteenth century, that is' [p. 23; italics in original].)

Freedman then adds another term to his model of cultural modernity: romanticism, which should be understood not as a reaction to the Enlightenment or as a binary opposite; rather, the Enlightenment and romanticism form a dialectical relationship. Just as the Enlightenment has tended strongly to become mere instrumentalism, so romanticism has frequently deformed into ‘the most banal antimodern and counter-Enlightenment irrationalism’ (p. 24). However, just as the Enlightenment contains contradictory impulses, so too does romanticism, attacking ‘capitalist aridity not in the name of any imagined status quo ante, but on behalf of a future-oriented vision of genuinely alienated, non-repressive wholeness’ (p. 25).  

Freedman argues that the completion of modernity would involve ‘the completion of both Enlightenment and Romanticism, freeing the former from its technicist instrumentalism and the latter from its tendency toward irrational reaction’ (p. 25). This brings Freedman, after some discussion of postmodernity, back to the questions of a Marxist theory of culture and, ultimately, Marxist strategy. While economic Marxism is ‘incomplete in the sense of being a still unfolding scientific project’, its ‘fundamental presuppositions . . . are tolerably stable’ (pp. 31–2). Marxist cultural analysis lacks any equivalent consensual principles, and throughout its history has

---

*The poetry of William Blake – a ‘dialectical combination of the most radically progressive elements in both Romanticism and Enlightenment’ (p. 25) – is cited as exemplary.*
Freedman’s introductory essay ends with a dialectical (and historicised) dismantling of the high-culture/low-culture paradigm which has dominated so much cultural studies, even (perhaps especially) discussions of postmodernity’s supposed erasure of this distinction. He goes on to suggest that the texts he writes about would anyway fall within some middle realm between high and low culture: ‘Though I would hesitate to declare flatly that texts of the sort to be examined in the pages to follow are necessarily and invariably more socially revealing than any other, I do suspect that they offer special and woefully underexploited opportunities for the typically looked outside of Marxist traditions for inspiration, models and theoretical frameworks. This ad hoc heterogeneity means that cultural Marxism – the best tool we have to even hope to arrive ‘at a truly adequate concept of culture’ – is ‘drastically incomplete’ (p. 33); and Freedman’s sense of this incompleteness brings to the surface, once more, the kind of Orwellian dilemma described above:

If the point, as the Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach has it, is to change the world, then we need to ask – more pointedly and more frequently, I think, than theorists of cultural Marxism normally do – just how, say, a better understanding of a novel by Robert Penn Warren or a film by Stanley Kubrick... is likely to contribute to this goal. To engage this question will, of course, return us to the whole issue of strategy, the area where, as we have seen, the incompleteness of Marxism is most glaring of all. (p. 33.)

An answer might be found, Freedman proposes, in contemporary right-wing opinion in the USA, which should be quite happy with ‘the general shape of the world today’ in terms of the ‘actual rollback of the Russian Revolution... hailed by Democrats with no less enthusiasm than by Republicans; Clinton’s early-1990s purging of ‘residual New Deal elements’ from the Democrats; the mainstreaming of previously hard-right goals such as ‘the partial repeal of the Social Security system... and the partial privatization of its remainder’, the partial de-funding of free universal public education, the ‘dismantling of affirmative action’, the ‘promotion of free trade agreements’, and the granting ‘to the bond market... of a practically absolute veto over federal tax policy and public expenditures’ (pp. 33–4). As Freedman asks, ‘[W]hat more could the right want?’ (p. 34). His response derives from the fact that contemporary right-wing thinkers ‘are shocked by the degree to which current American culture seems to them a creation of the left, and they tend to be haunted by a suspicion that, at least at the present time, a largely left-wing culture may be more difficult to bend to right-wing prescription than either economy or polity’ (p. 34). Although the leftism of culture is grossly exaggerated in the right-wing imagination, the current conjuncture is perhaps one in which radical ideas might find a more open reception in the cultural realm. Consequently, it might well be that Marxist cultural analysis is at this particular moment the tool best suited for strategic interventions – while neither losing sight ‘of the social areas even more important, finally, than culture’ nor ‘forget[ting] the continuing importance of historic defeat as an enabling condition of cultural studies’ (p. 36; italics in original).7

---

7 Freedman’s introductory essay ends with a dialectical (and historicised) dismantling of the high-culture/low-culture paradigm which has dominated so much cultural studies, even (perhaps especially) discussions of postmodernity’s supposed erasure of this distinction. He goes on to suggest that the texts he writes about would anyway fall within some middle realm between high and low culture: ‘Though I would hesitate to declare flatly that texts of the sort to be examined in the pages to follow are necessarily and invariably more socially revealing than any other, I do suspect that they offer special and woefully underexploited opportunities for the
Despite these caveats, the provisional answer at which Freedman arrives does sound dangerously similar to the culturalism of the weak cultural studies described above; and, knowing the chronology of the composition of the various essays, it is tempting to search for evidence that the introduction is a post-hoc rationalisation of their content, a corraling together of divergent work for the purposes of republishing them in book form. However, on closer examination, the opposite pertains: this introduction clearly emerges from the subsequent (but earlier) essays. Having shown us what he learned by writing them, Freedman then shows us how he learned what he learned by writing them; and, through this, he gives a valuable lesson in avoiding the excesses of the culturalist turn.

Rather than giving an account of each essay, I will instead outline aspects of several and note the reappearance and reworking of two idea-complexes or tropes as they emerge across the rest of the book.

**The occlusion trope**

‘On Kubrick’s 2001: Form and Ideology in Science Fiction Cinema’ begins by citing *Barry Lyndon* (1975), *The Shining* (1980) and *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) as proof of the proposition that ‘the typical Kubrick film . . . tends to remake or redefine the genre to which it belongs’ by critically reflecting on ‘its respective generic framework’ so as to ‘lay bare’ its ‘absolute presuppositions’ (p. 91). The most extreme, or perhaps fullest, example of this is science fiction; and with 2001: *A Space Odyssey* Kubrick ‘reinvent[ed] science fiction more radically than any other filmic genre, but . . . in so doing he engage[d] the extremely problematic character of the conjunction between science fiction and film’ and thus ‘question[ed] whether a genuinely science-fictional cinema is possible at all’ (p. 92).

Building on Darko Suvin’s seminal work on sf as the literature of cognitive estrangement, Freedman argues that sf is ‘the critical genre par excellence: the mode of prose fiction most capable (at least since the decline of the historical novel from its greatest achievements) of questioning all dogma, of staging the fundamental social dialectic of identity and difference, of exposing the mutable and historical character of every status quo, and of offering some privileged glimpses of the utopian possibilities that may lie beyond the actual’ (p. 107; italics in original). In contrast to sf literature, the history of sf film, from the Lumière brothers’ one-minute single-shot trick film
Charcuterie Méchanique (1895) to this year’s blockbusters, has been dominated by special effects, and herein lies the problem:

special effects are filmic moments of a radically filmic character, moments when the particular resources of film as a medium are inflected so as to differentiate film most sharply from every other aesthetic form. In special effects, we are invited to admire the peculiar power inherent in a continuous sequence of images whose scope is delimited only by the techniques of cinematography. . . . [S]pecial effects are not only radically filmic moments, but moments that . . . self-consciously foreground their own radicality. Special effects, in other words, not only use the visual . . . resources peculiar to cinema to an unusually thoroughgoing degree, but also incorporate an overt recognition of this fact. Whereas the realistic film . . . strives after an art to conceal art, special effects self-consciously deconceal their own artfulness by overtly glorying in the various technologies of filmmaking. (p. 99, 101; italics in the original.)

Sf film’s drive to be filmicness, to overwhelm the viewer in total spectacle, renders it as authoritarian as Wagnerian opera, especially when exhibited on a massive screen in a darkened auditorium with a cutting-edge sound system turned up, as is typically the case, too loud. This ‘dominance of special effects tends to induce an intellectual vacuity that directly contradicts the cognitive basis of science fiction itself’ (p. 109), as films like Close Encounters of the Third Kind (Spielberg 1977) and the Star Wars (Lucas 1977; Kershner 1980; Marquand 1983; Lucas 1999, 2002, 2005) series more than adequately demonstrate. The triumph of Kubrick and 2001, Freedman argues, is to recognise this contradiction and to explore it, ‘avoid[ing] being an intellectually banal film by becoming (among other things) a film self-reflexively about intellectual banality – and about the latter’s transcendence’ (p. 110; italics in the original).

As with other essays in this volume, this one prompts one to wonder what Freedman would make of texts he does not discuss.11 For example, how would Andrei Tarkovski’s utterly cinematic yet resolutely, indeed grimly, unspectacular Stalker (1979) fit into his argument? And how about A.I. – Artificial Intelligence (2001), a project Kubrick developed over many years but which, after his death, was directed by Spielberg? However, there are at least two more important questions to consider.

The first of them stems from observing this trope of occlusion recurring, in different forms, in both ‘England as Ideology: From Upstairs Downstairs to A Room with a View’ and ‘From History to Myth: The Ideology of M*A*S*H’. In the former, having outlined the fastidious attention to period detail in both the TV series and film, Freedman

---

11 This is no hyperbole: for example, his conclusions about M*A*S*H almost demand a piece on Star Trek: The Next Generation (1987–94), while his treatment of Red Harvest cast its various film adaptations – Yojimbo (Kurosawa 1961), Per un pugno di dollari (Leone 1964), Last Man Standing (Hill 1996) – in a fresh light.
contrasts the ways in which, despite some sympathetic portrayals of working-class and feminist politics, the TV series ‘emballms history in an immense scheme of empirical verisimilitude’ while ‘the film version of A Room with a View dispenses with history altogether – or rather, dispenses with all but an empty metageneric shell of times past, an abstract form of “traditional” Englishness’ (pp. 79–80). As with 2001, the film’s lush visual signifiers, particularly of costume and landscape, constitute a sensual experience ‘designed to seduce and absorb the viewer in the delighted contemplation of visual splendor rather than to provoke thought’ (p. 84). By ‘carefully excluding details that register the real social history of the period’ (p. 85), the film offers a depoliticised and ‘much more pristinely affirmative . . . picture of the Edwardian garden . . . that seems very nearly atemporal and hence eternal’ (p. 86; italics in the original); thus it does not merely neutralise but evacuates ‘specificity and . . . potential criticism’ (p. 86). Similarly, the film M*A*S*H (Altman 1970) ‘lacks any concrete sense of history or politics; as in any Barthesian myth, the content specific to time and place is drained away, to be replaced by putatively natural and universal values: in this case, the values of what might be called a bohemian humanitarianism’ (p. 49). Following Richard Dyer12 and, ultimately, Ernst Bloch, one must consider whether overwhelming spectacular special effects sequences – along with the spectacle of elaborate costumes and Edenic landscapes – actually fulfil, at least partially, one of the possibilities Freedman identifies with literary sf: do they offer ‘privileged glimpses of the utopian possibilities that may lie beyond the actual’ (p. 107)? Does their abundance, energy and intensity – along with the (somewhat depleted) image of community provided by the adolescent shenanigans of M*A*S*H – provide us with some sense of what utopia might feel like?

The second question is perhaps more specific to contemporary film. One of the goals of the computer-generated imagery (CGI) which now dominates the special effects industry is to produce photorealistic images. However, a simultaneous and contradictory goal of CGI is to draw attention to itself: it represents a significant proportion of a film’s budget and so, like the movie star, it must be visible, the audience must be able to see and recognise it as one of the expensive and spectacular filmic elements it has paid to see (and, to a certain extent, CGI sequences also represent a kind of product placement within the film industry). Consequently, one must ask whether special effects in addition to inducing intellectual banality (in filmmakers?) might also open up a space not only for awed but also critical contemplation (by film viewers). Similarly, although sf film aspires to total filmicness, it always, with the possible exception of such non-narrative avant garde shorts as Equation: $x + x = 0$ (Fairthorne and Salt 1936), fails; and this very failure, these moments of rupture between spectacle and non-spectacle not only point to the utopian fullness of the

---

former but also to the mundanity of the latter. This is, potentially at least, a fruitful contradiction, a fissure out from which critique might grow.

The Orwell trope

In ‘From History to Myth: The Ideology of M*A*S*H’, Freedman traces the film and TV adaptations of MASH, written by Richard Hornberger under the pseudonym Richard Hooker. A staunch Republican and anti-Communist, Hornberger was drafted for the Korean War, where he served in one of the innovative US Mobile Army Surgical Hospitals (or MASH units) which located surgical facilities close to the frontline. Despite a vague anti-authoritarianism in relation to senior officers, the novel never questions the Korean War and displays ‘almost no overt politics at all’ (p. 47). In literary terms, too, it is a very minor accomplishment.

Two years later, the movie M*A*S*H was a massive critical and commercial hit, ‘widely hailed in its time as a powerful statement against the Vietnam war and as a celebration of emancipatory values generally’ (p. 48). In hindsight, though, and despite Altman’s directorial skills and impressive performances by Elliot Gould and Donald Sutherland, it ‘leaves the essential conservatism of MASH intact’ while introducing ‘a violent hatred and loathing of women’ (p. 49). How, then, can its countercultural credentials be accounted for? Freedman suggests that the reasons are predominantly extra-textual, to be found in the collapse of the Cold-War consensus exemplified by the opposition by Americans to the US invasion and occupation of Vietnam: the film offers little if anything that can be considered liberatory, but the anti-authoritarianism of its protagonists did resonate strongly with prevailing countercultural anti-anti-Communism (which is not the same as pro-communism):

In the absence of a coherent political stance beyond the purely negative one of opposition to the war, any artefact that could plausibly be constructed as registering such opposition could be embraced despite its general conservatism. In one sense, the success of the Altman film was . . . a function of the strength of the antiwar movement; but in another sense that success was due to the movement’s central weakness. (p. 55.)

The commercial success of the movie led to the commissioning of the series M*A*S*H, which ran for eleven years from 1972 to 1983. Freedman traces its innovatory (for TV) blend of comic and serious drama, as well as its impressive (for TV) anti-institutionalism, anti-anti-Communism, anti-racism and anti-sexism, and suggests that there ‘are no rational criteria by which the political content of M*A*S*H can be considered, in the context of US commercial television, as anything less than extraordinary’ (p. 59). However, it must also be considered in terms of what Roland Barthes called ‘inoculation’, a process whereby an institution admits to its accidental evils so as to distract attention
from its primary evil; and, sure enough, for all its refusal to evade the political context of US Cold-War anti-Communism, it does simultaneously perform an inoculating function by its emphasis on ‘a romantic and heroic individualism’ which remains isolated and ‘incapable of collective action’ (p. 60; italics in the original). Moreover, it refused to ever consider the extent to which its romantic, heroic individuals are implicated in the ‘historically grounded institution’ (p. 61) of medicine: the inoculatory myth of M*A*S*H, then, lies in the fact that its attacks on the Cold War status quo are launched from the standpoint of a universalistic romantic individualism that is unable and unwilling to understand its own dependence on the very established order that, on one level, it wants to reject. (p. 62.)

Clearly, a version of Orwell’s dilemma looms large in this essay: the far from marginal doctors of the M*A*S*H unit enjoy class and institutional positions which enable them to flex their rebellious tendencies; however, their resistance-subversion-transgression is at best merely tactical, rather than strategic, because, like Orwell, they reject theory and thus are incapable of recognising their situation.

‘Labor and Politics in Dashiell Hammett’s Red Harvest’, co-written with Christopher Kendrick, provides an extremely detailed reading of this pre-eminent hardboiled crime novel in terms of the three kinds of labour – political, linguistic, sexual – which occur in it around the determinate absence of economic labour (the novel is set after the defeat of an IWW-led miners strike by strike-breaking gangsters who then refuse to leave town). What is of particular interest here is the role of the detective – Hammett’s unnamed Continental Op. As with M*A*S*H’s doctors, the Orwell trope is manifested in the detective’s contradictory position. The Op must, in the economic interests of the Agency which employs him, ‘act in the interests of its clients’ and ‘in alliance with (if not necessarily within) the letter of bourgeois legality’:

This alliance points to a crucial ambiguity in the very identity of the private detective. Though he is on one level independent of the police, and hence free of certain statist constraints on the individualist or ‘whole man,’ his entire position as a respectable entrepreneur (or a respectable entrepreneur’s employee) ties him to the state and makes him function, in the last analysis, as an adjunct to the official forces of law and order. (p. 135.)

Unlike such detectives as C. Auguste Dupin and Sherlock Holmes, who are little more than ratiocination devices, the hardboiled detective – like Hammett’s Op and Sam Spade, Raymond Chandler’s Philip Marlowe – does not proceed by the painstaking gathering and piecing together of clues. Instead, he stirs thing up, ‘tapping the various energies harbored within dialogue’ (p. 140), to see what will happen. And this is where one can draw an analogy between the hardboiled detective and the (professional Marxist) cultural critic: in the Op’s ‘alliance with the normative capitalist order and his apparent independence from it, between the social function and the individualist
character of his activities’; and in the fact that the production of ‘[d]ialogue as a “climate,”’ as apparent end in itself, not only makes the Op comfortable and furnishes him with his proper habitat but also . . . empowers him in his professional capacities’ (p. 138). He uses dialogue as a tool, ‘working in the long term to disrupt the already unstable gangster polity’, sometimes ‘planting his effects with precision’, more often ‘playing things by ear, fishing for effects’ (p. 138). Ultimately, ‘the Op’s construction of a dialogic world . . . completes and overloads the gangster world’,13 while ‘the free play of dialogue is what preserves the unalienated and aestheticized form of his labor’ (p. 140).

A brief conclusion

Freedman accounts for the success of the M*A*S*H TV series by writing Orwell’s dilemma very large:

viewers could relive a period when the problems of American society seemed specific and interesting rather than structural and mind-numbing; a period when a Frank Burns, or at worst, a Charles Emerson Winchester, seemed an adequate explanation of what was wrong with the world. The individualism of Hawkeye, after all, corresponded to an important strain in ‘60s culture, which always preferred personal confrontation to systemic analysis; and that preference was pleasant to contemplate in a more complicated era when systemic analysis was becoming more and more obviously necessary, difficult, and depressing. (p. 67.)

In contrast, the Continental Op offers a model for the professional Marxist intellectual of an actor in, amongst others, the realm of discourse, sensitive to historical specificity and unafraid of theorising and acting upon the structural. He might be the answer to Orwell’s dilemma, albeit an incomplete one.

References


13 Freedman is using ‘dialogic’ to mean spoken rather than written discourse, rather than in its Bakhtinian sense.
Frantz Fanon: A Life
DAVID MACEY
London: Granta Books, 2000
Reviewed by NEIL LAZARUS

I.

It is more than forty years since Fanon’s death. David Macey begins Frantz Fanon: A Life, with an account of his funeral in December 1961 – the ‘first and only time in the war of independence they had been waging since November 1954’ that the FLN (Front de Libération National) and ALN (Armée de la Libération Nationale) would be ‘able to bury one of their own with full honours’ in Algerian soil (p. 3). Representing the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic (GPRA), Belkacem Krim commended Fanon for his general ‘commitment to the struggle against [colonialist] oppression’ and for his particular commitment to ‘our liberation movement’. ‘You devoted your life to the cause of freedom, dignity, justice and good’, Krim declared in his eulogy. ‘Although you are dead, your memory will live on and will always be evoked by the noblest figures of our Revolution’ (pp. 4–5).

Macey proposes that, in the years since 1961, the ‘meaning’ of Fanon has tended to be framed schematically. He identifies two conflicting and incompatible schemas, each in its own way historically determinate. The first of these, to which Fanon himself was a conscious if only partial contributor, was liberationist ‘Third Worldism’. As an ideologeme, this schema corresponded to, and purported to represent, the upsurge of revolutionary anticolonial nationalism in the post-1945 period. The second schema is then that ensuing from the containment and rolling back of insurgent anticolonial nationalism by the imperialist powers since 1975 or so, and also, accordingly, from the assumed obsolescence of the earlier liberationist ‘Third-Worldist’ ideologeme.

The ‘Third-Worldist’ Fanon corresponds to the era of insurgent nationalism and liberation struggle. ‘The period of . . . “revolutionary Algeria”’, Macey writes,

represents the high tide of French Third Worldism, and Fanon helped to create that Third Worldism. A generation’s disillusionment with the orthodox left, and particularly with the Communist Party coincided with the rise of nationalism in the Third World and gave birth to the belief that the emergence of new states there would create a new humanism or even a new socialism.
Algeria, like Cuba, seemed to have a leading role in this process of rebirth. (pp. 20–1.)

The ‘Third-Worldist’ Fanon is the Fanon who writes, in the opening lines of the opening essay of *The Wretched of the Earth*, that decolonisation – ‘always a violent phenomenon’ – amounts, ‘quite simply’, to

the replacing of a certain ‘species’ of men by another ‘species’ of men. Without any period of transition, there is a total, complete, and absolute substitution. . . . To tell the truth, the proof of success lies in a whole social structure being changed from the bottom up. . . . Decolonization . . . sets out to change the order of the world.

This Fanon is disposed, by virtue of his objective situation (to say nothing of his characterological dispositions), to conflate decolonisation with revolution.2 In his ‘Third-Worldist’ avatar – which, it is necessary to emphasise, is not the only guise he assumes, not even in his most consistently ‘Third-Worldist’ texts – Fanon tends to collapse class struggle and national-liberation struggle into one another, thus ignoring the specificities and irreducibilities of each.

The weaknesses of Fanon’s ‘Third-Worldist’ formulations were evident from the outset, and – to the degree that they were discussed during his lifetime – they were criticised as such, within the Algerian national movement itself as well as in wider socialist discussions (mostly French). Yet it was not despite but precisely because of his ‘Third Worldism’ that Fanon that came to be taken up in the years following his death in 1961, as his writings began to find a very particular audience. Not in Algeria, where, as Macey observes, he was and has remained very little read; nor in France; nor in the Caribbean, not even in the Francophone territories and not even in his birthplace, Martinique; and nor in sub-Saharan Africa, where, as the novelist Ayi Kwei Armah (Ghanaian by nationality, pan-Africanist by ideological disposition) lamented in an article written in 1969, Fanon was scarcely known at all, whether in Anglophone or Francophone circles.3 Instead, in the United States, where the posthumous *Les Damnés de la terre* was first published in English translation as *The Wretched of the Earth* in 1965, and its analysis quickly extrapolated to the then-emergent black-nationalist and liberationist discourse. (Hence the American Black Cat edition of 1968, whose front cover heralded ‘The handbook for the black revolution that is changing the shape of the world’, and whose blurb read as follows: ‘written in anger, this book by a distinguished Black psychiatrist and leading spokesman of the revolution which won independence for Algeria is no mere diatribe against the white man or the West. It is

1 Fanon 1968, p. 35.
2 This is an argument I have tried to make in some of my own writings on Fanon over the years. See for instance Lazarus 1990, pp. 27–45; and Lazarus 1999, pp. 76–105.
3 Armah 1969.
a brilliant examination of the role of violence in effecting historical change which has served leaders of emerging nations as a veritable handbook of revolutionary practice and social reorganization.

Macey correctly links the waning of this ‘Third-Worldist’ Fanon to social – indeed, one might say epochal – developments in the wider world. But he is not, I think, quite precise enough in his delineation of what he calls the ‘ebb of Third Worldism’ (p. 21). Sharper accounts have been presented by Samir Amin, above all in his *Capitalism in the Age of Globalization*, and – within postcolonial studies – by such writers as Aijaz Ahmad, Arif Dirlik and Timothy Brennan. The key point, I take it, is that the containment or recuperation, starting in the 1970s, of the historic challenge from the ‘Third World’ that had been expressed in the struggle for decolonisation in the post-1945 years must be seen in the light of the global reassertion and consolidation of what Amin calls ‘the logic of unilateral capital’. If the crescendo of revolutionary anticolonialism was reached with the defeat of the American forces in Vietnam and the overthrow of fascism in Portugal and of Portuguese colonialism in Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique and Angola in the mid-1970s, the quarter-century or so since then has seen the triumph of neoliberalism and the reassertion of an imperialist order, headquartered in the United States. The invasion and ongoing occupation of Iraq are but the latest notes to be sounded in this latter cacophony.

It is within this latter phase, of ‘globalisation’ and the reassertion of imperialism, that the academic field of postcolonial studies has emerged. The field not only arose in close chronological proximity to the end of the era of insurgent nationalism. It also characteristically offered something approximating a monumentalisation of this moment – a rationalisation of and pragmatic adjustment to, if not quite a celebration of, the downturn in the fortunes and influence of insurgent national-liberation movements and revolutionary-socialist ideologies in the early 1970s. It is within postcolonial studies that the second schematic construction of Fanon arose. Since the ‘Third-Worldist’ mytheme of Fanon was quite manifestly unsuitable to this emerging field’s ideological project, it was necessary to construct a new one: a ‘postcolonial’ Fanon, a Fanon neither for nor of his own times but rather for ‘ours’ – where ‘we’ are taken to be those living in ‘post-’ time, for whom (sometime between 1968 or 1975, evidently) everything changed, and changed utterly, such that in the aftermath ‘we’ are not only ‘post-colonial’, but also post-nationalist, post-liberationist, post-Marxist, and post-modern. The “post-colonial” Fanon’ Macy writes, ‘is in many ways an inverted image of the “revolutionary Fanon” of the 1960s’:

‘Third Worldist’ readings largely ignored the Fanon of *Peau noire, masques blancs*, post-colonial readings concentrate almost exclusively on that text.

---

and studiously avoid the question of violence. The Third Worldist Fanon was an apocalyptic creature; the post-colonial Fanon worries about identity politics, and often about his own sexual identity, but he is no longer angry. (p. 28.)

Macey deplores not only the studied depoliticising (which is to say, repoliticising) of Fanon’s career, but also the dehistoricising thrust of the newer scholarship, the crushing selectivity and attenuation of the ‘intellectual’ or ‘theoretical’ contexts to which Fanon’s thought and writing are related. He argues, thus, that

The recent crop of books and articles – and one film – on Fanon . . . construct a Fanon who exists outside time and space and in a purely textual dimension . . . . Few of the authors concerned stray far away from the most familiar of his texts and appear to have consulted nothing produced by the FLN. Post-colonial theorists’ enthusiasm for Derrida and Lacan tends to blind them to Fanon’s debts to Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, not to mention the similarities between his work and that of his contemporaries Albert Memmi and Jean Amrouche. (p. 27.)

One of the signal achievements of Frantz Fanon: A Life, in these terms, is to put paid, more or less definitively, to arguments that the ‘postcolonial’ Fanon plausibly registers the thrust and substance of Fanon’s actual thought or writing. As Macey remarks, in one of the many asides that he directs tellingly at the theorist whose scholarly production over the course of the past twenty years has been largely responsible for conjuring the ‘postcolonial’ Fanon into existence,

[Homi] Bhabha’s claim that there is no ‘master narrative’ in Peau noire has surely to be countered by the argument that there is most definitely a master narrative at work in L’An V de la révolution algérienne and Les Damnés de la terre. It is the narrative of the Algerian Revolution. It may be difficult to believe in it at the beginning of a new millennium, but Fanon did believe in it and died for it. (p. 28.)

Macey is neither the first nor the only person to argue this case, of course: such contemporary scholars as Nigel Gibson, Lewis Gordon, Benita Parry, Cedric Robinson, E. San Juan Jr., and Ato Sekyi Otu have all written to similar effect, in their very different ways – as I have myself. But Macey’s contribution to this still unfolding critique is particularly welcome. To read his study is to recognise that there is no future for the illusion that has been the ‘postcolonial’ Fanon. Put crudely, Homi Bhabha’s Fanon simply cannot be squared either with Fanon’s actual writings or with

---

the trajectory of Fanon’s own career. The weight and authority of the counter-evidence adduced in Macey’s book is sufficient to strip the warrant not only from Bhabha’s work on Fanon (at least to the degree that this work is taken to be a commentary on Fanon rather than on ‘postcoloniality’ or the contemporary world order), but also from that of the many postcolonial critics who have predicated their own commentaries on Fanon on it. Macey dismisses in passing, in this respect, Isaac Julien’s influential film, *Frantz Fanon: Black Skin, White Mask* (1995) and Alan Read’s edited volume, *The Fact of Blackness: Frantz Fanon and Visual Representation*. But the names of any number of other postcolonial critics of the 1980s and 1990s could be added to this list.

II.

To say that Macey’s book effectively blows the ‘postcolonial’ Fanon out of the water is not, of course, to say that it exonerates the earlier schema of the ‘Third-Worldist’ Fanon. On the contrary: Macey tends, as I have already suggested, to cast the ‘Third-Worldist’ and the ‘postcolonial’ schemas as mirror images of one another. Both appropriate Fanon for their own historically specific projects; both construct him in the image of their own ideological concerns.

What Macey sets out to do instead is to paint a picture of Fanon as a radically singular figure, not a representative one. His study offers both a fine-grained historicisation of its subject (such that we see Fanon constantly in context) and a view onto a quite irreducible life, from which it seems particularly unsound to generalise. After an opening chapter (from which all of my citations thus far have been drawn), meta-theoretical in character and entitled ‘Forgetting Fanon, Remembering Fanon’ (another swipe at Bhabha, whose ‘Preface’ to a 1986 reissue of the English version of *Black Skin, White Masks*, had been entitled ‘Remembering Fanon’), Macey devotes detailed consideration to Fanon’s childhood in Martinique, his war-time experiences, his training as a psychiatrist and subsequent practice in France, his posting to Algeria and – most extensively – his politicisation and revolutionary activism on behalf of the movement for national liberation in Algeria between 1956 and his death in 1961. In what follows, I will not attempt to rehearse or even summarise Macey’s exposition. Rather, I will confine myself to picking up certain threads which, considered together, give an insight into the ‘line’ on Fanon that Macey unfolds over the course of his book.

A good place to start might be with Fanon’s anger, to which Macey gives special emphasis, characterising it as the one ‘truly Fanonian emotion’ (p. 28). He quotes from a January 1945 letter which Fanon wrote to his brother, Joby, from a military hospital in France. (He was in the hospital recovering from wounds he had incurred fighting
with the Free French.) The letter is marked by its bitterness of tone: Fanon had come to realise, writes Macey, ‘that freedom was not indivisible. He was a black soldier in a white man’s army’ (p. 103). Specifically, he had learned that his volunteerism on behalf of abstract principles of ‘freedom’, ‘France’, ‘anti-fascism’, counted for nothing in the eyes of the majority of French citizens, for whom he remained a black man, and, as such, unassimilable – indelibly other if not necessarily onto-genetically inferior.

In another letter, to his parents, in April 1945, he wrote that ‘Nothing here, nothing justifies my sudden decision to defend the interests of farmers who don’t give a damn’ (p. 104). The ‘sudden decision’ refers to the impulsive flight he had made from Martinique to Dominica as a seventeen year old in 1943 to sign up to fight with the Free French in the War. Impulsiveness and anger exist side-by-side in his make-up. His rage is volcanic and abrupt (if, in its social dimensions, at least, a response to deeply-layered and longstanding injustice: hence massively over-determined). As he would write in a key sequence in the 1952 *Black Skin, White Masks*,

> Where shall I find shelter from now on? I felt an easily identifiable flood mounting out of the countless facets of my being. I was about to be angry.

> The fire was long since out, and once more the nigger was trembling.

> ‘Look how handsome the Negro is!…’

> ‘Kiss the handsome Negro’s ass, madame!’

> Shame flooded her face. At last I was set free from my rumination. At the same time I accomplished two things: I identified my enemies and I made a scene. A grand slam. Now one would be able to laugh.⁷

Macey suggests that to anger and impulsiveness in the Fanonian character we have also to add irrevocability. The decisions Fanon takes are not only made in the blink of an eye, ‘spontaneously’, as it were, but, once made, are set in stone, irreversible. Thus of Fanon’s decision to leave France for Algeria in 1953, for instance, Macey writes that it was taken as suddenly as those that had taken Fanon to Dominica in 1943 and to Lyon in 1946. In an undated letter, he unexpectedly told his brother Joby: ‘I’m going to Algeria. You understand: the French have enough psychiatrists to take care of their madmen. I’d rather go to a country where they need me.’ Philippe Lucas, a sociologist who knew Fanon in Algeria, reports a conversation with Josie Fanon [Fanon’s wife] in which she told him that whilst Fanon settled on Blida after a process of elimination, or in other words because no other post appealed to him, he also had an ‘obvious’ preference for working in the colonies rather than in the metropolis. Once taken, the decision was, as always, irrevocable. (p. 203.)

⁷ Fanon 1967, p. 114.
The characterological features that Macey identifies in Fanon include his explosive rage against injustice, his impulsiveness, the intensity of his ethical disposition, his personal courage, the passion and relentlessness of his intellectual commitments, and the impatience and urgency of his political ones. These are all paradigmatically modernist structures of feeling, and it is in precisely these terms – rather than as a postmodernist avant la lettre – that Macey situates Fanon in his thought and action. ‘In Peau noire, masques blancs, Fanon’s vocabulary is that of the modernism of the 1940s’, he writes at one point (p. 127); and of that book in general, he argues compellingly that

[the best way to approach [it] ... is to regard it as an extended exercise in bricolage, the term Lévi-Strauss used to describe how myths are assembled from the materials that are to hand; the word literally means ‘do it yourself’.

Bricolage is a good way of describing just what Fanon was doing as he plundered the libraries and bookshops of Lyon and then strode up and down, dictating his text to Josie. The main materials to hand were the phenomenology of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, the cultural discourse or tradition of negritude, the psychiatry in which Fanon had just trained, and the fragments of psychoanalytic theory he had absorbed from books. His relationship with his raw materials was never easy – the relationships with negritude and psychoanalysis were particularly fraught – and their synthesis was far from being a smooth one. To describe Peau noire as the product of bricolage is not to disparage either Fanon or his book. The term quite simply describes what he was doing: using elements of a then modernist philosophy and psychoanalysis to explore and analyse his own situation and experience, even though he had no real academic training as a philosopher and no extensive knowledge of psychoanalysis. (pp. 162–3.)

Macey is very persuasive in his explication of the problematic or field of vision of Black Skin, White Masks. Like Patrick Taylor, whose The Narrative of Liberation he surprisingly appears not to have read, he places particular emphasis on Fanon’s phenomenological examination of the experience of racialisation in a colonial world. In passing, he demonstrates how inadequate is the available English translation of Fanon’s text, which among other things inexplicably renders the title of the key chapter on ‘The Lived Experience [l’expérience vécue] of the Black Man’ as ‘The Fact of Blackness’, thereby reifying into an objective and pre-existent social datum precisely the relational and praxiological instance (‘race’, being ‘black’ in a ‘white’ world) that Fanon sets out to examine. Addressing the Fanonian category of ‘lived experience’, Macey sketches its derivation from the German Erlebnis. This is the term used by Husserl and Heidegger.

---

8 See Taylor 1989.
and then drawn into French philosophy by Merleau-Ponty – above all in his *The Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) – to designate ‘experience’ not, as that term is usually understood, as the effect on a subject of events unfolding in the world around it, but rather as a mode of being in the world. To ‘experience’, in this sense, is ‘to be in internal communication with the world, the body and other, to be with them rather than alongside them’ (Merleau-Ponty, quoted at p. 164). Fanon takes up the category of ‘lived experience’, in these terms, in order to develop his idea that ‘blackness’ is not a matter of self-actualisation but of social inscription. As Macey writes,

Fanon speaks of the need to understand the man of colour ‘in the dimension of his being-for-others [*pour-autrui*]’. This dimension situates his man of colour in a world in which he never exists in-himself as a monad, but always in a conflict-ridden relationship with others, or the other. He exists to the extent that he is seen and heard by others, to the extent that he is for others. So too the white man. Hence the concluding argument that the negro ‘is’ not (does not exist), and nor ‘is’ the white man. Trapped in their respective ‘whiteness’ and ‘blackness’, they ‘are’ only insofar as they create one another, though this does not imply any reciprocity. (p. 164.)

### III.

When Fanon left France to take up a position as médecin-chef at the Blida-Joinville psychiatric hospital in Algeria in 1953, he knew very little about Algeria. He had had some professional dealings with North-African patients in Lyon. But he spoke no Arabic, had done no specialist reading about the Maghreb, and was more or less completely uninformed about the explosive political situation in Algeria. Certainly, he was disposed to identify with Algerians on the basis of their colonisation by France – there are ‘tears to be dried throughout the whole French territory (the metropolis and the French union)’, Macey quotes him as writing (p. 203); but he did not move to Algeria out of any sense of political commitment. As Macey observes,

There is no hint that Fanon believed in 1953 that Algeria should be an independent nation. Although he had every sympathy with the people of Algeria, he had no real vision of their future. At this point, his politics consisted of the ‘humanist solidarity’ that informs *Peau noire, masques blancs* and he was not a member of any political organization or party... Fanon did not go to Algeria armed with any decisive truths or revolutionary doctrines. He did not go there as the apocalyptic prophet of the Third Worldism of *Les Damnés de la terre*. Nothing in his early work anticipates the theses on the cleansing and liberating effects of revolutionary violence with which he would become so closely associated. The Fanon of *Les Damnés de la terre* was a product of Algeria and its war of independence. (pp. 203–4.)
Having previously worked both in Lyons and at the celebrated Saint-Alban hospital, Fanon had had some exposure to the most progressive trends then obtaining in French psychiatry. In Algeria, however, he found himself face to face with colonial psychiatry. It was not only that medical practice in Algeria generally was heavily corrupt. It was also, and more importantly, that medicine was ‘an integral part of an oppressive system’ (p. 217). Many French doctors in Algeria, as Macey explains,

regarded their patients as little better than animals, and described themselves as practising veterinary medicine. Some of Fanon’s colleagues in Blida also had lucrative private practices, and did not view their work in the hospital as a full-time commitment. For other doctors working in Algiers, the Blida hospital was no more than a convenient dumping ground for patients whose conditions were such that they could not be effectively – or profitably – treated in the private sector. Fanon accepted that there were decent and humane European doctors working in Algeria, but added ‘It is said of them that “They are not like the others”’. (pp. 217–18.)

The violence of psychiatric practice in Algeria rested on ‘doctrinal foundations’ which, as Fanon was to write in 1956, in his justly famous letter of resignation to the Resident Minister, Governor General of Algeria, constituted ‘a daily defiance of an authentically human outlook’.* Like medicine more generally, psychiatry as it was practised in Algeria represented an extension – a rationalisation and even a refinement – of colonial thought and administration. Fundamentally racist in its assumptions, the psychiatry of the ‘Algiers school’ began by defining Algerian culture, Maghrebian culture and Muslim culture in terms of pathology and criminality – which meant, of course, that its subsequent diagnosis of the expression of such culture on the part of individual Algerians, Arabs and Muslims, as pathological and criminal, was merely tautological. Macey refers to Antoine Porot, the founder of the ‘Algiers school’, who, in an article published in 1918, had deplored ‘the Muslim native’s remarkable propensity for the passive life, his habitual insouciance about the future, and his childlike credulity and stubbornness’ (p. 223). He quotes Porot directly as asserting that it is very difficult to construct a psychology of the Muslim native because ‘there is so much mobility, and so many contradictions in a mentality that has developed on such a different level to our own, and which is governed both by the most rudimentary instincts and a sort of religious and fatalistic metaphysics’ (p. 223). Other ‘Algiers-school’ psychiatrists sounded many of the same notes, characterising Algerians in general as ‘credulous and suggestible . . . prone to outbursts of homicidal rage, fanatical, possessively jealous and fatalistic’ (p. 223). Islam itself was directly implicated in ‘Algiers-school’ representations: a ‘pathogenic agent’, its supposed ‘symptoms’ included ‘fatalism, an obsession with words (the repeated “Allah, Allah”), delusional sadness, the perversion

* Fanon 1969, p. 52.
of the sexual instinct (masturbation and pederasty), and auditory hallucinations that provoke sudden outbursts of violence’ (p. 221). An influential study published in 1908 cast Islam as a contagious epidemic, which it was necessary to extirpate root and branch: ‘Islam does not bring with it any justification for its existence, because it is destructive. It neither creates nor produces anything, and therefore could not survive at all if it could not live parasitically on human groups that do work’ (quoted at p. 221).

We can note in passing the persistence of these tawdry orientalist conceptions as to the pathology and incorrigibility of ‘Islam’ and ‘Arab culture’, which today are wheeled out by American and European warmongers eager to justify the terrorism of their own ‘war on terrorism’. Fanon, at least, was quick to realise that theories built on a priori assumptions concerning a ‘clash of civilisations’, and buttressed by cultural supremacism, were ideological in the strict sense: that is to say, they served as a cover or active justification for colonialist or imperialist domination. Yet, although he would come to define psychiatry as an impossibility in a society steeped, as was the Algeria of the 1950s, in murderous violence, he did achieve some notable successes in his attempts to render the provision of psychiatric services at Blida-Joinville compatible with his broader socialist and humanist ideals. Not that these successes came easy. On the contrary, they were preceded, and continued to be accompanied, by signal failures. (Macey’s scrupulous account gives the lie to the rather facile postcolonialist image of Fanon as ‘healer/liberator’.)

In one of his essays in *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon was famously to write that

> If the building of a bridge does not enrich the awareness of those who work on it, then that bridge ought not to be built and the citizens can go on swimming across the river or going by boat. The bridge should not be ‘parachuted down’ from above; it should not be imposed by a *deus ex machina* upon the social scene; on the contrary it should come from the muscles and the brains of the citizens.10

This insight evidently derived, in part at least, from Fanon’s own experiences at Blida-Joinville. For, at first, his attempts to counter what Macey calls ‘the punitive culture of the hospital’, and to replace it with a more receptive and constructively interactive culture, foundered on mutual incomprehension and mistrust. As Fanon himself wrote, in a 1954 paper co-authored with his colleague, Jacques Azoulay, ‘We were attempting to create certain institutions, but we forgot that any attempt to do so has to be preceded by a tenacious, concrete and real investigation into the organic bases of the native society’ (quoted at p. 231). Macey adds the summary comment that Fanon ‘had spontaneously endorsed the ideology of assimilation by expecting

---

10 Fanon 1968, pp. 200–1.
his patients to make the effort to adapt to a Western culture. He now realized that he had to make the transition to cultural relativism rather than assuming the superiority of French culture' (p. 231). Increasingly, Fanon sought to introduce innovations to hospital protocols and procedures in accordance with cultural norms in the wider Algerian society:

The gradual process of cultural change began with the creation of that essential feature of male social life in North Africa – a Moorish café where patients could play dominoes or simply talk while sipping mint tea in a room decorated with their own paintings and furnished with both European chairs and tables and the traditional floor mats and low tables. Traditional festivals began to be celebrated and the local Mufti was invited to come to the hospital twice a month to lead Friday prayers. Inviting traditional story-tellers was a successful recognition of the fact that the local culture was predominantly oral, but it was also a potentially dangerous move on Fanon's part. The colonial authorities had no love of wandering story-tellers who transmitted rumours as well as folk-tales, and such itinerants became objects of great suspicion when the war started. Itinerants carried news and spread rumours; stories could be an incitement to rebellion. Other innovations took Fanon closer still to a major rupture with the hospital authorities. He had discovered that men who could not be persuaded to weave baskets because that was 'women’s work' could be persuaded to work in the grounds and to grow vegetables: ‘Giving them a spade or a mattock is enough to make them start digging and hoeing.’ It was also enough to terrify his European staff: these were the traditional weapons of peasant revolt and they had been used to deadly effect at Sétif; they would be used again to massacre European civilians in the Constantinois in the summer of 1955. (p. 233.)

The goal of psychiatry, as Fanon understood it, was reconstitution, dis-alienation. Psychiatry, as he would put it in his letter of resignation to the Resident Minister, ‘is the medical technique that aims to enable man no longer to be a stranger to his environment’. But the longer he worked at Blida-Joinville, the more Fanon was made to see that the conditions of possibility for psychiatric dis-alienation were definitively lacking in the social universe of Algeria in the mid-1950s. Hence his argument to the

---

11 Fanon 1969, p. 53. This understanding of the goal of psychiatry, as Macey correctly points out, is fundamentally at odds with the tenets of Lacanian psychoanalysis, from which Fanon ‘departs … by referring to the need to strengthen the ego – which Lacan regarded as the capital sin of American ego-psychology. Fanon consistently described mental illness as a form of alienation from the world and as a loss of existential freedom. As a therapist, his goal was to “conscientize” [conscientiser] his patient’s conflicts so as to establish a new and more positive relationship with the external world. Fanon always stresses the sociogenic aspects of symptomatology: symptoms did not, in this view, originate from the personal unconscious or repressed sexual impulses so much as from a distorted dialectic between the ego and the world and from the internalization of social conflicts’ (p. 323).
Resident Minister that ‘the Arab, permanently an alien in his own country, lives in a state of absolute depersonalization’. Such a state – which he also termed ‘systematized de-humanization’ – could not be psychically redeemed, since, as he put it, ‘[t]he social structure existing in Algeria was hostile to any attempt to put the individual back where he belonged’. It was impossible to instantiate psychiatry, to give it a tangible and substantive authority – in a word, to make it work – in an environment in which ‘the lawlessness, the inequality, the multi-daily murder of man were raised to the status of legislative principles’.

IV.

Fanon’s resignation from his position at Blida-Joinville in 1956 (and coincidentally from service in the French colonial state), freed him physically and ethically to dedicate himself to the cause of Algerian liberation. Macey offers a lucid and comprehensive account, both of the course of the war of independence that broke out in November 1954 and that soon thereafter exploded into full-scale revolution, and of Fanon’s career during these years, as his own political philosophy radicalised sharply in response to the unfolding events in Algeria and he attempted to contribute his professional and intellectual skills to the revolutionary struggle.

The Fanon who emerges in such works as L’An V de la Révolution algérienne (1959) and the posthumously published Les Damnés de la terre and Pour la révolution africaine (the latter made up substantially of Fanon’s writings for the underground FLN organ, El Moudjahid) is very much a product of the Algerian revolution. The overarching themes in this work include revolutionary-nationalist anticolonialism, violence, popular political mobilisation, the relation between party and people and between proletarian and peasant classes, the role of culture and ideology in the furtherance of the struggle, and the Algerian struggle and its relevance for and relation to ‘African’ and ‘Third-World’ liberation struggles.

Macey’s account is sympathetic but not uncritical. He offers a cogent rebuttal, for instance, of the criticisms of those – such as Jean Daniel, Jean-Marie Domenach and Hannah Arendt – who have charged Fanon with glorifying violence for its own sake. Quoting from the essay, ‘Concerning Violence’, in The Wretched of the Earth – ‘What, in reality, is this violence?... It is the colonized masses’ intuition that their liberation must come about, and can only come about, through force’ – he argues that Fanon’s critics have symptomatically misread him:

12 Fanon 1969, p. 53.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
15 English translation, Fanon 1970.
In a sense, it is the term ‘violence’ itself that is so scandalous; had Fanon spoken of ‘armed struggle’... [his argument] would have been much less contentious. ... Fanon does not ‘glorify’ violence and in fact rarely describes it in any detail: there are no descriptions of what happens when a bomb explodes in a crowded café and when shards of glass slice into human flesh. The violence Fanon evokes is instrumental and he never dwells or gloats on its effects. In a sense it is almost absurd to criticize Fanon for his advocacy of violence. He did not need to advocate it. The ALN was fighting a war and armies are not normally called upon to justify their violence. By 1961, the violence was everywhere. (p. 475.)

Macey suggests, however, that Fanon is inclined to generalise unwarrantedly from Algeria to Africa (and the ‘Third World’) at large, to derive abstract conclusions concerning the necessary course of decolonisation in any context or situation from specific and irreducible Algerian contexts and situations. When Fanon ‘insists that a violent liberation struggle leads to a higher or purer form of independence’, Macey writes, ‘he is thinking of the future independence of Algeria. What he fails to recognize is that, in terms of the decolonization of “French” Africa at least, Algeria was the exception and not the rule’ (p. 476).

Now, one could argue that while Fanon is certainly right to insist that decolonisation is ‘always a violent phenomenon’ – ‘always’, because colonisation is always a violent phenomenon; nowhere in the colonial world was independence ever won without tremendous struggle on the part of the colonised – his theories concerning the centrality and, indeed, indispensability of violence in securing decolonisation are more readily applicable to settler formations than to ‘administrative’ colonies. In the former, it almost always proved necessary for the native population to resort to armed struggle to obtain independence; in the latter, independence was often achieved on the basis of ‘negotiation’ rather than the revolutionary overthrow of the recalcitrant colonial order. Is Fanon’s theory then to be understood as grounding or presuming a distinction between decolonisation in settler and administrative colonies, such that the former, because of the revolutionary violence upon which it is predicated, tends to lead to ‘a higher or purer form of independence’? The problem here is that, if we look at developments since independence, there seems little correlation between the level of violence entailed in the liberation struggle and the subsequent success or failure of the revolution. National liberation won on the basis of armed struggle has not necessarily

---

16 This rebuttal also tells against the American academic, Christopher L. Miller, who has given a recent airing to the argument that Fanon glorifies violence. ‘For Fanon’, Miller has written, ‘violence has a transcendental power to liberate and cure the psychological ills of the colonized; violence “illuminates,” “deintoxicates,” and “unifies the people”’ (1999, p. 49). Macey cites Miller’s study, but surprisingly fails to subject it to criticism. For a critique of Miller, see Lazarus 1999, pp. 82–8, 97–103.

been stronger or more resilient or more deeply sedimented in popular consciousness than liberation secured on the basis of a negotiated transfer of power. (Nor necessarily weaker or less resilient, of course.) The accumulated examples of, say, Cuba, Nicaragua, Algeria, Vietnam, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, on the one hand, and India, Tunisia, Jamaica, Ghana, and Senegal, on the other, do not enable a clear-cut pattern to be discerned in this respect.

Macey quotes Francis Jeanson, philosopher, editor of the original French edition of Peau noire, masques blancs, subsequently an activist courageously committed to the cause of Algerian liberation, and author of La Révolution algérienne (1962), who wrote in 1965 that Fanon ‘had a “terrible need” to take the most radical option and to reject any form of action that did not have an immediate influence on the direction of the struggle’ (p. 303). This is a damaging assessment, which, if admitted, would certainly go some way toward accounting for the voluntarist tenor of some of Fanon’s ideas and formulations. Macey mentions the dreadful mistake over Angola, for instance, where, quite largely at Fanon’s insistence, the FLN resolved to lend the weight of its support (as one of the best established and internationally most influential of anticolonial liberation movements) to Roberto Holden’s Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola, celebrating both the brutality of FNLA cadres’ premature, poorly conceived and ill-prepared assault on Portuguese settlers in 1961 and Holden’s refusal, on racial grounds, to merge the FNLA with the mulatto-led Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola, whose popular support and strategic intelligence greatly exceeded that of the FNLA. ‘I know Holden is inferior to the MPLA men’, Fanon conceded. ‘But Holden is ready to begin and they are not. And I am convinced that what is necessary is to begin, and that an Angolan revolutionary movement will be formed in the ensuing struggle’ (quoted at p. 391). ‘Over-confident and over-optimistic’, Macey writes, ‘insisting on “beginning now”’, and convinced that the Algerian model of the uprisings of 1956 could be exported to a country of which they had little concrete knowledge’, Fanon and his colleagues in the FLN ‘made a disastrous political miscalculation’ (p. 392). The Portuguese forces in Angola responded to the FNLA attacks by killing as many as 20,000 Angolans in terroristic reprisals. Moreover, the division within the anticolonial front took years to mend, drastically undermining the effectivity of the resistance.18

Fanon’s voluntarism derives not from his advocacy of violence, but from what I have elsewhere called his ‘messianism’ – his tendency to assume the unity and co-ordinated political will of the masses of the Algerian population in contexts where it could not realistically have been supposed to exist (and where, in historical retrospect, it can in fact be demonstrated not to have existed). Macey speaks in this respect of

---

18 For further commentary on these developments, see Davidson 1975, on which Macey draws, and Gibson 1972, pp. 197–242.
Fanon’s ‘idealization’ of the Algerian peasantry (pp. 483–4) and suggests illuminatingly that he sometimes ‘mistook temporary changes born of extraordinary circumstances for a permanent revolution’ (p. 406). Fanon clearly misread the mass recruitment of the Algerian peasantry to the FLN as testifying to their embrace of the FLN’s platform. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, thus, he spoke of the ‘upward thrust of the people’, who had ‘decided, in the name of the whole continent, to weigh in strongly against the colonial regime’; and, with reference to Africa at large, he eulogised the ‘coordinated effort on the part of two hundred and fifty million men to triumph over stupidity, hunger, and inhumanity at the same time’.19 Such formulations, which seemed implausible even at the time, cannot withstand scrutiny in hindsight. Alluding to the celebrated essay on ‘The Pitfalls of National Consciousness’ in *The Wretched of the Earth*, Macey writes that ‘Fanon had feared that the national bourgeoisie would confiscate the revolution. But it was confiscated by the FLN and by the army that stood behind it in the shadows’ (p. 502). But this latter development cannot be reconciled with Fanon’s evocation of a disciplined and progressively unified population coming closer and closer to self-knowledge as the struggle against the French colonial forces intensified. For it seems inconceivable that, having been decisively and world-historically conscientised during the anticolonial struggle (as Fanon claims they had been), Algerians would have permitted themselves to be so easily and so quickly neutralised after decolonisation. The truth, rather, would seem to be that, as a class, the Algerian peasantry was never fully committed to the secular, socialist vision of the FLN, even when it was fighting under the FLN’s leadership. Thus Ian Clegg, on the basis of his research into peasant politics and state formation in Algeria in the years following independence in 1962, claims that

The involvement of the population of the traditional rural areas in the independence struggle must be clearly separated from their passivity in face of its revolutionary aftermath. The peasants were fighting for what they regarded as their inheritance; a heritage firmly rooted in the Arab, Berber, and Islamic past. Their consciousness was rooted in the values and traditions of this past, and their aim was its re-creation.20

Clegg’s analysis enables us to account both for the Algerian peasantry’s commitment to the struggle for independence, on the one hand, and, on the other, for its lack of concerted militancy in face of the FLN’s (anti-socialist) policies of the years immediately following decolonisation, when ‘[n]either the peasantry nor the subproletariat played any other than a purely negative role in the events’.21

---

19 Fanon 1968, p. 164.
20 Clegg 1979, p. 239.
21 Ibid.
to be drawn here as been spelled out, in a different context, by the American academic James C. Scott as follows:

[Peasant] resistance... begins... close to the ground, rooted firmly in the homely but meaningful realities of daily experience.... The values resisters are defending are equally near at hand and familiar. Their point of departure is the practices and norms that have proven effective in the past and appear to offer some promise of reducing or reversing the losses they suffer. The goals of resistance are as modest as its values. The poor strive to gain work, land, and income; they are not aiming at large historical abstractions such as socialism. ... Even when such slogans as ‘socialism’ take hold among subordinate classes, they are likely to mean something radically different to the rank and file than to the radical intelligentsia.22

In this light, Clegg’s complaint that Fanon ‘lacks a critical and dialectical analysis of the process of the formation of consciousness’23 rings as plausible and judicious. For Fanon’s formulations are consistently intellectualist in tone, often phrasing subaltern thought and practice in the elitist-idealist vocabulary of negation, abstract totalisation, and self-actualisation.

V.

In his ‘Afterword’, Macey recalls his first encounter with Fanon’s work. This took place in 1970, during a year which he spent in Paris as part of his undergraduate degree in French. Macey writes that he ‘read a lot’ that year, and adds significantly that ‘It was the beginning of the moment of theory, a time to read Althusser, Lacan and Foucault’ (p. 502). We can infer, I think, that the 20 year-old Englishman had no sooner discovered Fanon than he forgot him again. For, in the light of ‘theory’, with its anti-dialectical and anti-humanist emphases, Fanon quickly ‘began to look naïve’.

Was it then only in the 1990s, as the world of ‘theory’ was collapsing, at least partially under the weight of its own accumulated contradictions, that Macey turned again to Fanon? I do not know the answer to this question, but it is what I suspect. In any event, Macey writes that it is a good time, today,

to reread Fanon. Not to hear once more the call for violent revolution, but to recapture the quality of the anger that inspired it. Fanon does not speak for the tragic Algeria of today. The themes of Third World solidarity and unity, of a version of Pan-Africanism and of the liberating power of violence

23 Clegg 1979, p. 239.
have not worn well. For a generation, Fanon was a prophet. He has become a witness to the process of decolonization but, whilst his discussion of racism remains valid, he has little to say about the outcome of that process.

Fanon was angry. His readers should still be angry too. Angry that Algerian immigrants could be treated with such contempt in a police station. Angry at the casual racism that still assumes that the black and North African youths of the suburbs are all criminals or at least potential criminals. . . . Angry at the cultural alienation that still afflicts the children of Martinique, so beautiful in their smart school uniforms and so convinced that they are just like other French children until someone teaches them otherwise. Angry at what has happened in Algeria. Angry that the wretched of the earth are still with us. Anger does not in itself produce political programmes for change, but it is perhaps the most basic political emotion. Without it, there is no hope. (p. 503.)

These are moving lines, but I quote them in closing my discussion both to affirm and to dispute them. My sense is that *Frantz Fanon: A Life* is a paradigm-ending book, not a paradigm-creating one. The paradigm that it ends is that of the ‘postcolonial’ Fanon, the Fanon read in the light of concerns deriving from the theoretical universe of poststructuralism – which, Macey seems to concede in his ‘Afterword’, have in general been his concerns too.

I wonder, though, whether Macey is not still speaking like a poststructuralist when he declares that Fanon ‘has little to say about the outcome’ of the process of decolonisation? Although he refers on a number of occasions to ‘The Pitfalls of National Consciousness’, he does not, I think, pay sufficient attention to this essay. It is clear (not least from the consistent misspellings of names that plague his study in this particular respect: of George Lamming, Alain Locke, Tom Mboya, Peter Worsley, Moise Tshombe) that Macey is relatively poorly informed about sub-Saharan Africa and the Anglophone black-Atlantic world. He does not give any space to today’s African or African-diaspora intellectuals who continue to regard Fanon’s writings on nationalism and decolonisation as indispensable guides to contemporary politics and culture. I am thinking, for instance, not only of Lamming, but also of the Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong’o, who continues to urge his readers ‘to read two books without which I believe it is impossible to understand what informs African writing, particularly novels written by Africans. They are Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*, mosty the chapter entitled “The Pitfalls of National Consciousness” and V.I. Lenin’s *Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism*.24

Ngugi’s juxtaposition of Fanon and Lenin is especially interesting, I think. It speaks to Fanon’s contemporary relevance: at least, it does so for those of us for whom the

---

24 Ngugi wa Thiong’o 1987, p. 63.
turn to poststructuralism, to what we used jokingly to call ‘SLAB theory’ [Saussure, Lacan, Althusser, Barthes], looms as a giant wrong-turn in the history of ideas. Let me put the matter sloganistically: notwithstanding the claims that have been made for the obsolescence of the world in which Fanon lived and wrote, for the epochal character of the restructuring of global social relations since 1968 or 1973, for the revolution wrought by globalisation, it seems to me that the New World Order is the old imperialist world order, un-transformed but continuously brought up to date, as one would expect of any modern formation. Not ‘Empire’, as Hardt and Negri would have it, but imperialism. This is the order to which Fanon was implacably opposed, and against which he fought so courageously. If, over the course of the past fifteen years, it has somehow been possible in postcolonial studies to deny the salience of the concept and theory of imperialism, one can at least hope that the unfolding of recent events in Afghanistan and Iraq since 2001 has demonstrated the intellectual indefensibility of this gesture.

References

Fanon, Frantz 1968 [1961], The Wretched of the Earth, trans. by Constance Farrington, New York: Grove Press.


Franklin Rosemont’s *Joe Hill* is in many ways a beautiful book. In these days of war without end in the Middle East and visible ‘politics’ in the US seemingly reduced to a right-wing party and a far-right party, the book gives me a high that makes me want to run out the door and organise. I feel like a curmudgeon criticising it in any serious way. The book is above all important for a new generation of activists trying to situate itself in the rubble bequeathed by the twentieth-century bureaucratic-statist ‘Left’ (social-democratic, Stalinist, Third-Worldist, Trotskyist) and the latter’s wooden ideologies.

There’s something breathtaking and exhilarating about a book that gets Hill and the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) into the same narrative with Apollinaire, Artaud, Franz von Baader, Basho, Blake, Bosch, Lester Bowie, Byron, Duerer, Victor Hugo, Bob Kaufman, Philip Lamantia, Man Ray, Thelonious Monk, Gérard de Nerval, Charlie Parker, Erik Satie, Shelley, Vico and Hoene Wronski, to give the reader just a faint whiff of its breadth. The book is abundantly illustrated and is a labour of love pulling together the scant traces of Hill’s itinerant life to connect them, and the IWW, to much of the radical culture and politics of the twentieth century. Rosemont manages to make it all seem effortlessly self-evident. For initial inspiration, Rosemont had the good fortune of discovering the IWW in 1959 and of being able to meet a fair number of ‘old timers’ who still gathered at the remaining Wobbly offices in places such as Chicago and Seattle, some of whom had known Hill personally. Thus, before getting into any criticism, it is necessary to outline what Rosemont has done.

The book provides an admonitory ‘review of the literature’, concluding that a ‘first-rate, truly comprehensive history of the IWW is yet to be written’. As Rosemont points out, such a task is made far more difficult by the outrageous crime of the US government’s 1917 seizure and destruction of the IWW’s records. He talks about the vitality of the IWW’s relationship to Marx, with worker self-education and study groups on *Capital* an ongoing part of the organisation’s life. In contrast to much of the subsequent Left, the Wobblies ‘actually read and studied Marx’. Their story, and this dimension of it, is interwoven with that of Charles H. Kerr Publishers. Whereas
later leftist vanguards mainly produced publications, ‘some of them admittedly of high quality’, for workers, IWW publications were ‘of and by as well as for’. Most Wobblies, in Rosemont’s view, rejected the ‘syndicalist’ label, and were considered too Marxist by most actual syndicalists and as too anarchist by other (and subsequent) currents of Marxism. The IWW was ‘truly informal, wide open, constantly rejuvenated by new energies from the rank and file’. By the ‘high place it always accorded to spontaneity, poetry and humor, the IWW was unique in the history of the labor movement’. They knew ‘too much about work to be “workerist”’. Rosemont also evokes the social space created by the IWW’s meeting halls scattered across the US.

Rosemont confronts the problem that ‘biographical data on Hill is discouragingly skimpy’, though ‘he is probably the best-known hobo in US history’. Without false modesty, Hill, in his own words, did ‘not have much to say about [his] own person’. Rosemont particularly (and rightly) takes apart Wallace Stegner’s 1948 slanderous portrayal of Hill as a common criminal. He gives a brief biography from the ‘armful of solid facts, some strong probabilities, and a bedraggled suitcase of educated guesses and plausible suppositions’ about Hill’s life. ‘In his own lifetime’, writes Rosemont, Hill ‘was above all known for his poetry and his song’, contributing many songs to the IWW’s Little Red Song Book. While the IWW press was full of poetry written by its members, the true ‘Wobbly poets’ as poets have received almost no recognition. The Wobblies sang, at meetings, on strike, and in their halls. Hill, like many Wobblies, went to Mexico during the revolution there. He participated in the Fraser River Strike in Canada in 1912. Then, in January 1914, passing through Salt Lake City, he was arrested as a suspect in the murder of a local grocer, framed and, in spite of an international defence campaign, was executed in November 1915. Tens of thousands of people attended his funeral in Chicago, the biggest such gathering since the funeral of the Haymarket martyrs in 1887.

Hill was an artist: a poet, a composer, songwriter, painter and cartoonist. Once again, the role of poetry and song in the daily life and struggles of the IWW, anticipating such strikers’ festivals as May 1968 in France, and, as such, antipodes to the grim atmosphere of the politics of much of the organised Left in the US since World War I, cannot be overemphasised.

Rosemont also takes apart the posthumous myths, positive and negative, which have clouded the historical reality. Hill was neither a larger-than-life super-militant nor an itinerant petty criminal; as Rosemont points out, to mystify the organising role of the modest Hill is to feed into an alienated cult of ‘leaders’ for an organisation that prided itself on the anti-demagogic slogan ‘We Are All Leaders!’.

Rosemont shows commendable nuance on the issue of race, one on which the IWW, for its time, went radically against the grain of the dominant reactionary culture. ‘Even Joe Hill’, he writes, ‘. . . fell somewhat short of perfection in this regard’, citing Hill’s
song ‘Scissor Bill’ which attacks the backward white worker for his racial hatreds, attributing to Scissor Bill a series of ugly racial epithets which nonetheless ‘in any racially mixed gathering . . . could only have provoked embarrassment among singers and listeners alike’. There is no question that the IWW, precisely in the decade before World War I when Jim Crow was reaching the height of its influence, when the ‘progressive’ President Woodrow Wilson was an unabashed white supremacist, went farther in attacking America’s white problem than any working-class organisation before or since. Its founding convention was addressed by Lucy Parsons, the firebrand of black and Mexican Indian ancestry. At a time when the American Federation of Labor (the AF of L) was openly supporting anti-Asian legislation and when many of its affiliated unions had explicit ‘whites only’ membership clauses, the IWW welcomed wage-workers of every colour and nationality into its ranks. One Wobbly was Covington Hall, poet, organiser and agitator who participated in the IWW’s battles in the Alabama timber industry, which organised blacks and whites together in the heart of the Jim Crow South. The IWW was also strong among black longshoremen in Philadelphia, Baltimore and elsewhere.

Rosemont (similarly author of the brilliant pamphlet Karl Marx and the Iroquois available on line) shows how the IWW, in its relations with and attitudes towards Native Americans, was more attuned to the sensibility of Marx’s (then unknown, and today still little-known) Ethnological Notebooks than any social-democratic, Stalinist or Trotskyist current ever was. (Nothing, he admits, is known about Joe Hill’s views on these matters.) In the midst of anti-Asian ‘Yellow Peril’ hysteria, Hill cultivated a talent for cooking Chinese food. Rosemont points to direct testimonies from those who participated in the ‘highly egalitarian and anti-racist’ Wobbly hobo camps. The Wobblies were similarly far ahead of their times on the ‘woman question’, with many women in the front ranks, even if they also sometimes had a tendency to describe their ‘Rebel Girls’ as being there to boost the morale of the ‘Rebel Boys’. They spoke frankly of prostitution as being a direct product of the immiseration of the working class. They fought against ‘Pie in the Sky’ religion, while inheriting elements of the millenarianism of the radical Protestant sects of an earlier era. Rosemont has some particularly acute insights into the way in which the capitalist use of thugs and gangsters against the IWW facilitated the ‘gangsterisation’ of the US: once local elites had allowed gangsters to run amok against labour organisers, the latter knew too much to be gotten rid of, and took over their share of the loot on a permanent basis.

Similarly interesting is Rosemont’s material on the relationship between the IWW and the American Communist Party (or ‘Comical’ Party, as the Wobblies called it). While the IWW obviously hailed the Russian Revolution, by 1921 it was already suspicious of the growing statism apparent in Russia. Rosemont’s formulations are worth quoting at length:
From the IWW point of view, the CP turned out to be one of the worst things that ever happened to the US labor movement. Moreover, Wobs knew the difference between the Party’s hidebound elite and the broad rank-and-file. It was the Wobblies’ own bitter experience with the Communist leadership – the self-styled ‘vanguard’ – which led them to conclude that the Communist Party was not truly a workers’ organization at all, but a hopelessly authoritarian middle-class political party, neo-Byzantine in its hierarchical and bureaucratic structure, thoroughly dominated by a parasitical bourgeois intellectual elite. (p. 367.)

Rosemont also provides material on Wobblies who were also members of the American Federation of Labor and later of the Congress of Industrial Organizations, pushing for revolutionary industrial unionism. More interesting still is his account of ‘the countless acts of violence perpetrated by Stalinists against more radical elements in the labor movement here in the US’ which, as Rosemont points out, ‘are almost never mentioned in books on US radicalism’.

Past the peak of the IWW’s mass influence in the working class, Rosemont shows the Wobblies to have had a quite advanced awareness of what today would be called ecology, echoed in Hill’s letters. He traces the subsequent influence of the IWW from the Beat Generation (above all through Gary Snyder) to popular literature. And, once again, the poetry:

For me, indeed, and for many of my friends . . . poetry was vitally important in our introduction to the IWW. The union’s historic and ongoing emphasis on poetry and song immediately impressed us as one of the decisive qualities that made it unique among labor and left organizations. And we were right: That the IWW produced and inspired more and better poetry than all other unions combined serves not only to distinguish it from all other unions, but also tells us a lot about the kind of world it was trying to build. (p. 423.)

This poetic dimension propelled the IWW’s influence into the modernist avant-garde, as in Big Bill Haywood’s ties to Greenwich Village, or the Village artists who worked on the 1913 Paterson Pageant during the famous New Jersey strike. Rosemont also captures another dimension of the IWW’s heyday with a chapter on the lost art of soapboxing, central to many of their campaigns and called by Vachel Lindsay ‘the Higher Vaudeville’.

So what are my curmudgeonly – and, I emphasise, secondary – criticisms of Rosemont’s book? The main one is an irritating resort to a kind of ‘special pleading’ linking Joe Hill to broader themes Rosemont (rightly) wants to discuss. Joe Hill was in Mexico for a time during the Mexican Revolution. Fine. Rosemont writes, in the midst of eleven (very interesting) pages on the IWW and the Mexican Revolution:
‘And what role did Joe Hill play in all this? Here, as almost everywhere else in Hill’s biography, the absence of precise detail is glaring and frustrating.’

Hill went to Hawaii in 1911. Rosemont writes, amidst, again, a very interesting discussion of IWW activity there:

Although no documents have come to light regarding Hill’s doings in Hawaii, it is a virtual certain that he visited other representatives of the IWW while he was there. In view of what we know of his activity in other places, it does not seem unlikely that he lent a hand to the union’s agitation in Hawaii. And it is not impossible that his impact there was far greater than anyone has ever dreamed. After 1911, in any case, Hawaii became a Wobbly hot spot. (p. 96.)

Rosemont had nine illuminating pages on the IWW and Native Americans. Once again:

And Joe Hill? Here we draw a complete blank. We know as much about Hill’s views on the ‘Indian Question’ as we know about his opinion of Beethoven’s Fifth, or Don Quixote, or the poetry of Li Po: that is, nothing at all. (p. 241.)

On Hill’s Chinese cooking:

In such a hate-filled climate, proclaiming one’s passion for Chinese food and flaunting one’s knack for using chopsticks would quality as acts of dissidence and defiance. I am not trying to make too much of too little; I realise that Hill’s simple gestures cannot be considered acts of great courage or revolutionary import, and do not tell us much about his thinking. Nonetheless, such small, personal, ‘non-political’ signs of non-conformism should not be altogether dismissed; surely they count for something in the broader scheme of things. (p. 246.)

Surely they do. And I could go on.

A magnanimous friend suggested to me that, given the small number of known facts about Joe Hill’s life, Rosemont is like an archaeologist reconstructing a whole historical era from a few shards of pottery. And in many parts of the book, this works. It’s just that Rosemont never asks the basic question about the IWW: what went wrong? Not unlike other authors he cites who have written brilliantly about little-known or forgotten radical episodes, such as C.L.R. James (in Notes on Dialectics or in Facing Reality) or Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker (in their co-authored Many Headed Hydra), Rosemont has no explanation for defeat. In these bleak times, one hardly needs to dwell on defeat. Particularly after the collapse of the so-called ‘Soviet’ bloc (the actual soviets were defunct by 1921), all the defeated early twentieth-century alternatives to statist-bureaucratic ‘socialism’ came back into view,
from anarchism to syndicalism to figures such as Rosa Luxemburg or Amadeo Bordiga, and none so clearly as the IWW (and not merely in the US). But, if we are to reshape the imagination of the 1905–24 IWW for our own time – a project I find as compelling (and urgent) as Rosemont does – we will have to better understand why it was eclipsed. What happened to this wonderful group of people that we have to look back 90–100 years to find? Rosemont’s book is like a brilliant meteor that falls into a depressing and dull landscape on a forgotten asteroid. But, if we believe in historical processes, we are forced to admit that, in an odd way, there is not much historical analysis in a 640-page book chock-full of facts and loving reconstructions of the life of Hill and the IWW and much else. If, for example, the Trotskyists are wrong to say (as they do) that the IWW was eclipsed by the Communist Party because the Wobblies lacked the coherent political perspective which the early CP got from Lenin and Trotsky, why did it occur? Why was the CP and not the IWW the mass movement of the 1930s? Rosemont has his hands full living up to his sub-title about the ‘making of a revolutionary working-class counterculture’, and he generally does it very well. It seems carping to ask of such a work that it also say something about ‘economics’, technological change, the vast mutation of the capitalist state from 1890 to 1945, or about the triumph, starting in the early 1930s, of the Mark Hanna-Owen Young-Gerard Swope attitude towards industrial unions among big capitalists, or finally about the impact of mass culture (radio, movies, and later TV) and mass education on popular song and poetry, as influences on the demise of the IWW. Most of these things are not even mentioned. Rosemont attacks Dubofsky and other academics for seeing the IWW as in decline in 1919 and says, no, it was 1924, but he does not ever devote a single line to describing the reasons for that downturn. The depression of 1920 (coupled with the Red Scare) wiped out unions all over the US. What impact did it have on the Wobblies? Rosemont does not mention it.

He wonderfully underscores the importance of song and poetry for the movement; great, where do I sign up? But what commonly shared body of song or poetry today could play that role as a starting point? Most lefties I know cannot even sing one verse of the ‘Internationale’. Rosemont talks about Joe Hill being alive and well among working people, and I think of the working-class students I met teaching adult education courses in New York City, not one of whom had ever heard of the IWW, not to mention Joe Hill. Rosemont is writing from within what today is a sub-culture and dressing it up as a class culture.

Of course, Rosemont, given the vastness of what he does manage to do, is not obliged to answer many questions about ‘what happened’ after the demise of the IWW (which he seems to only grudgingly concede, in a couple of asides, ever took place). But he is not writing for antiquarian edification, but, presumably, to inspire the present and the future. When I close that book, with the ‘high’ it induces, I want, once again, to rush out the door and find the crowd that is working on making that
vision alive for our time, and, instead, I hit a wall, or a void. And that is what raises the above questions about the limits of Rosemont’s wonderful magical mystery tour that are rarely if ever posed as a problem. Are we to suppose that tens of thousands of magnificent people came together from 1905 to 1924 and just as mysteriously dispersed or were dispersed? Many more workers did not join the IWW than did; who were they, and why did they not? To provide some historical grasp of the ‘specificity’ of the IWW, of its strengths and its weaknesses relative to the forces that eclipsed it is the only way to make its poetry potentially contemporary.
From Syndicalism to Trotskyism – Writings of Alfred and Marguerite Rosmer.

REVOLUTIONARY HISTORY, VOLUME 7, ISSUE 4, WINTER 2000–2001

Reviewed by VINCENT PRÉSUMEY

The journal Revolutionary History, Volume 7, Issue 4, has offered Anglophone readers an excellent selection of texts by Alfred Rosmer (1877–1964), a French international revolutionary, best-known outside France for his memoir, Moscou sous Lénine [Lenin’s Moscow]. Rosmer was also the author of a very fine, albeit unfinished, history of the French workers’ movement during the First World War,¹ and of a complementary text to Leon Trotsky’s autobiography My Life, entitled The Planet Without a Visa. Rosmer was not a ‘theoretician’, and his temperament was unobtrusive and modest. Indifferent to honours or prestige, he was a foremost political thinker with a profound knowledge of the workers’ movement and the working class which he came from. He left several articles which are a precious set of contributions to the history and analysis of twentieth-century revolutionary struggles. Along with his work, one should note the presence at his side of Marguerite Rosmer, his partner and equal. As well as enabling us to find out about Rosmer, this issue of Revolutionary History will be valuable to every reader looking for some of the finest material produced by the French workers’ movement over the last hundred years. Additionally, it constitutes an excellent entry-point into the international history of the socialist revolution, of which Rosmer was, throughout his life, an active participant and, during the early 1920s, a leading figure in Moscow.

In France itself, Rosmer is little known today, although it would be a mistake to think that this is because he was a marginal revolutionary. On the contrary, Rosmer was a product of one of the most deeply-rooted traditions of the French working class: the revolutionary syndicalism of the years before 1914. It was in this tradition that much of the activity of the most combative workers and trade-union delegates for decades can be located. Rosmer, like his friend Pierre Monatte (it was customary to refer to them as a pair, always as ‘Monatte and Rosmer’) learned about class action particularly during the CGT’s campaign to win the eight-hour working day on the general strike of 1 May 1906. Although it did not achieve this goal (finally conquered in 1919), the strike left a durable mark on social relations. The strikes of 1920, 1936,
1947, 1953, 1968, 1995, 2003 and 2006 all owe some of their substance to the experiences of 1906. The ruling class has always detested this. One of its leading essayists, Alain Minc, in the newspaper *Le Figaro*, after December 1995, called it the ‘taste for throwing fits’. It is this circumstance that better accounts for Rosmer’s current anonymity.

A fairly complete biography about Alfred Rosmer written by Christian Gras was published over thirty years ago.\(^2\) It should be read together with two other biographical works about him: one of them by the ‘spiritual father’ of revolutionary syndicalism, Fernand Pelloutier, which appeared around the same time as Gras’s,\(^3\) and the other, published recently, of Pierre Monatte by Colette Chambelland, of which an account will be found in the same issue of *Revolutionary History*.\(^4\) These three works are indispensable for any serious study of the French workers’ movement, and, of the three, it is the last (also the shortest) which best recaptures the warmth and quality of an activist world we have lost, that of the ‘passionate lovers of self-cultivation’ to use Pelloutier’s expression.

Rosmer was of that world. His real name was Griot. He had a poor childhood in the USA and in France. His pseudonym was taken from an Ibsen character. His autodidactic temperament and his desire to become his own man are characteristic of his whole generation’s mentality, a very active generation heavily influenced by anarchism and devoted to the appropriation by workers of culture, both classical and modern. Rosmer was a connoisseur of the art of the 1900s, of the fauvism and of Pissarro. This dimension of his personality was not unique to him and constitutes a historically important trait. In the articles published by *Revolutionary History* it is only mentioned in the obituary by Roger Hagnauer at the start of the collection.

A second key theme is, as I have already mentioned, the famous ‘revolutionary syndicalism’, a tradition in which the theories of Georges Sorel actually occupied only a very secondary place. For Rosmer, it was very clear: the trade unionism of the CGT, and the presence within it of an important group of activists seeking to ‘inform’, enlighten, educate, and instruct the working class, around the magazine *La Vie Ouvrière*\(^5\) founded by Pierre Monatte, were the means to help the proletariat to expropriate capital and destroy the state, in other words, the means to revolution. In moving from that brand of syndicalism to Bolshevism, Rosmer personally felt no discontinuity, though in this, it must be said, he was quite unusual.

For Rosmer, the great discontinuity in his life, in history, in his thought, was August 1914. In his account of that period,\(^6\) he emphasises the fact that not only the parties of the Second International, but also almost all the revolutionary syndicalists and the anarchists, had rallied to the War and into a ‘holy alliance’ with the bourgeoisie. With

\(^2\) Gras 1971.
\(^3\) Julliard 1971.
\(^4\) Chambellard 1999.
\(^5\) This is still the subtitle of the CGT’s publication.
\(^6\) Cf. Footnote 1.
his friend Monatte, who at that time was considered a ‘French Liebknecht’ in CGT circles, he felt the trauma in the depths of his being. It was at this time (the beginning of the ‘midnight of the century’) that he met Trotsky. It was the personal meeting of two individuals who henceforth became each other’s cherished friends, and a historical meeting of French revolutionary syndicalism outside the Second International, and Russian revolutionary Social Democracy, its best product.

Monatte was called up, and Rosmer was the mainspring, back home, of the French Zimmerwaldist movement, and to some extent a mainspring of the international Zimmerwaldist movement. From that platform, Rosmer’s upheld a position, which he asserts in the chapter of his history of the workers’ movement during the War published in *Revolutionary History* (pp. 50–8) which coincided with Trotsky’s and was opposed to Lenin’s ‘revolutionary defeatism’. This position involved the goal of organising on the double theme of peace and the pursuit of the class struggle as the right way to move towards revolution.

Rosmer’s great project, in Moscow or during the revolution in Baku, as the head of the Red International of Labour Unions, was to implement, on an international level, the synthesis symbolised by his meeting with Trotsky. He thus tried to conciliate and bring together the viewpoints of the ‘pure’ syndicalists and anarchists on the one hand, and of the Bolsheviks on the other, into a tentative overall perspective, which would receive, at the Fourth Congress of the Communist International, the name of ‘Workers’ United Front’. Lenin and Trotsky had implicitly given him the leading role in this work (which included Victor Serge and Andreu Nin), and so, for example, he spoke in the name of the Communist International at the funeral of the Russian anarchist Pyotr Kropotkin. *Revolutionary History* includes a summary of this by Reiner Tosstorf, and also the speeches and articles by Rosmer on this theme (pp. 60–83). Like the task of building a ‘French Bolshevism’, and more generally, of building a Communist International with parties that would definitely take a Bolshevik, but not a ‘Russian’ stand, it was a long job whose tempo could not sit well with the urgency of the revolutionary task involved. At the moment when it might have seemed that there was some amount of time to achieve it, three key events erupted one after the other: the defeat of the German Revolution, Lenin’s death, and Trotsky’s defeat in a factional battle carried through with the means of state power.

These events came down on Rosmer simultaneously with the rapid formation, in the French Communist Party, of a layer of ‘little corporals’, normally known as ‘Bolshevisation’. After having attended the Fifth Congress of the International at the end of 1924, Rosmer was expelled with Monatte and Delagarde. They were among the first important figures to be expelled for ‘Trotskyism’. Together, they then launched a fine magazine, taking up the educational tradition of *La Vie Ouvrière: La Révolution Prolétarienne (RP)*, subtitled ‘communist syndicalist journal’. During the second half of the 1920s, Rosmer’s positions, which did not always coincide with Trotsky’s (he
thought, for example, that the Anglo-Russian Committee was a positive step in building a united front of the working class) seemed to be expectant of the outcome of the internal struggle in Russia.

Trotsky’s exile was for him, at first, a rallying-call. He left *RP*, which henceforth was subtitled ‘Revolutionary Syndicalist journal’ (no longer ‘Communist’). Thus, between Monatte and Trotsky, he chose Trotsky. The intensity of Rosmer’s activity at this point should be emphasised. Without him, the whole Trotskyist current would not have been the same. The presentation in *Revolutionary History* mentions his role in France, Austria, Germany, and Belgium; we should add Indochina, Luxemburg, and Hungary to that list, and understand that, in fact, Rosmer was the international organiser of the Left Opposition at its the time when this organisation was taking its first steps.

The extracts published here from the correspondence between Trotsky and Alfred and Marguerite Rosmer give some idea of this role and of the Left Opposition’s rapid collapse (pp. 119–50). They do not allow the reader to fully understand what initially appeared as a political break, a crisis largely triggered off by Rosmer’s fatigue and by the heavy burden of past hopes and defeats. It is clear, however, that Rosmer was deeply disappointed to see that a Trotskyist organisation was not free from the kind of behaviour characteristic of the ‘little corporal’ type who had expelled him from the Communist Party: his reaction was in part that of a French trade unionist facing methods which he considered alien, not to his country – that was far from his concerns – but to his class. He was not isolated, for the then communist-syndicalist ‘École émancipée’ tendency (the teachers’ federation of the CGTU) distanced itself at the same time from the Trotskyist current.

Rosmer did not want to lead, organise, or initiate a ‘Rosmerist’ current, though he could have done so – various groups of Trotskyist origin, like the Communist Left of Colette Audry and Michel Collinet or the current led by the Austrian Kurt Landau, laid some claims to represent his legacy. He wrote to and, in fact, resumed a very close friendship with Leon and Natalia Trotsky when it was once again ‘midnight in the century’ (at the time of the Moscow Trials). Many accounts of the history of the Fourth International often mention the fact that the 1938 congress which proclaimed its foundation was held at his house, in Périgny.

One of the most questionable, and perhaps reductionist aspects of *Revolutionary History*’s issue is the title it gives to the section dedicated to Alfred Rosmer’s last struggles (‘After Trotsky’), as though there was nothing after Trotsky! In another sense, the title of the volume, *From Syndicalism to Trotskyism*, is also reductionist, because it suggests a linear progression culminating in Trotskyism, which is not how Alfred Rosmer experienced his evolution, nor how he saw things in regard to himself. All his life, whether as a leader based in Moscow or as the first founder after Trotsky himself of the International Left Opposition, or writing, or travelling, or returning to
activity, Rosmer remained the worker-militant he had been since the beginning of the century, a correspondent of numerous activists, well-known and obscure, and, let it be noted, one of the few French students of the British and American labour movements – this explains his irritation with Daniel Guérin which appears in one of the articles published here (p. 152).

He was one of those who concerned themselves with the possibility of playing a role in large organisations and who were sceptical about systematically building smaller ones, which too often tear themselves apart. That does not mean that he contented himself with being no more than a writer, a correspondent, and a commentator. In 1947, he took part in the relaunch of Révolution Prolétarienne, which would greatly influence the left wing of the CGT-FO, and thus met up with Monatte again. During the Cold War, Monatte and Rosmer, working together again, distanced themselves for a time from the magazine that they had founded, and went on to create the Zimmerwald Circle. They rejected the support given to the ‘American party’ by some of the editors of the magazine in the name of defence of democratic and workers’ rights and wanted to maintain an internationalist viewpoint, neither pro-American nor pro-Russian. This part of Alfred Rosmer’s life was not without interest and should have also been presented in this number of Revolutionary History.

For Rosmer, the hope of seeing the revolution live again was reborn with the revolution of the Hungarian workers’ councils in 1956, and with the Algerian Revolution, for which he signed the ‘Manifesto of the 121’, but he died soon afterwards.

As can be seen, someone like Rosmer deserves to be known and studied not only for what he was, but for the sake of the real history of the struggle of the exploited, which is made up of men like him. Fundamentally, he deserves to be known for his relevance today. Let us hope that this publication will encourage many to know, learn, and translate more material by and about him.

Translated by Martin Thomas

References


Rosmer, Alfred 1993 [republished facsimile], Le Mouvement ouvrier pendant la Première guerre mondiale, 2 volumes, Paris: Éditions d’Avron.

Ancient Umbria

GUY BRADLEY

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000

Reviewed by ELENA ISAYEV

Bradley’s Ancient Umbria is a welcome addition to research into the history of ancient Italy. Referring to it as simply a regional study would amount to only touching the surface of this rich and complex work, which sheds new light on the sociopolitical processes that configured the whole of the ancient Mediterranean. The work also provides a good example of how archaeology can successfully be integrated with literary and other forms of evidence in the writing of ancient social history. Indeed, there is almost no form of evidence which has not been examined in creating this description of ancient Umbria during the period between the ninth and the first centuries BCE.

This study fits well with other similar works published in recent years, which use the case of Italy as a basis for a discussion on state formation, the emergence of identities and the effect of external pressures on such processes, particularly from Imperial Rome. Dench covers similar issues further south, in the mountainous spine of the peninsula.1 The themes Bradley considers are not new in themselves, but the methods used to approach them have developed substantially through the incorporation of evidence from rapidly expanding sources of archaeological material. This evidence allows us to reach beyond the models presented by ancient authors, most of whom are a product of elite-urban society. Their narratives are often silent about alternative community structures or, when they are considered, present them in a ‘primitive’ light. Their views have informed traditional paradigms which, for example, place ‘the city’ at the pinnacle of a developmental trajectory, ruling out the possibility of co-existence between urban states and equally complex territorial states. Recent studies have highlighted the diversity of structures which dotted the ancient Mediterranean.2 Ancient written sources, which provide stereotypical and generalised descriptions of ‘the other’ are also, to a large extent, responsible for the image of strongly defined ethnic groups. Already in the late 1960s, Fredrik Barth had begun breaking down nineteenth-century views which saw ethnic identity as static and impenetrable. He

1 Dench 1995.
2 See Brock and Hodkinson 2000 and Horden and Purcell 2000.

Historical Materialism, volume 14:4 (279–288)
© Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, 2006
Also available online – www.brill.nl
showed, instead, that there was no core ethnicity and that the boundaries of a ‘perceived’ ethnic identity were not impermeable. More recently, with a focus on ancient Greece, Emma Hall, Jonathan Hall and Catherine Morgan have argued that ethnic identity is a ‘social construct’, and only one of a number of ‘competing identities’. Such studies have also forced a reconsideration of acculturation, which should no longer be seen simply in terms of primitive cultures passively accepting new identities from more developed ones, but rather in terms of two-way exchange networks. These new approaches lend even further support to the image of Italic communities in Ancient Umbria.

Bradley’s work consists of six chapters and four appendices. The chapters are divided chronologically while the divisions within them are thematic. The first chapter, ‘Approaching the History of Ancient Umbria’ (pp. 1–28), instantly makes it clear that this is not an apologetic history (p. 4). Key issues that the author intends to address in the work are: the nature of Umbrian communities both before and after the Roman conquest; problems of urbanisation as a hierarchical model; development of state structures and identity; changes and continuing trends during and after Roman conquest and the dangers of using ‘Romanisation’ as a term and model of the processes. A historiographical summary (pp. 5–19) indicates that earlier studies primarily consider Umbria from a Romano-centric viewpoint, while more recent works focus on material remains, but do not provide a history of the region. This is partly due to the scattered nature of the material. Bradley points out the difficulties of using archaeological evidence, which tends to be dispersed through a variety of publications and exhibition catalogues, often remaining published only in a preliminary form.

The second half of this introductory chapter (pp. 19–28) begins to tackle the problem of defining Umbria both geographically and culturally. Perhaps it is not surprising that in such a topographically diverse region, of mountains interspersed with high plains, a variety of state forms should develop as well as multiple identities. However, this is not how the ancient Greek authors portrayed the people of Umbria. Already in the sixth to fifth centuries BC, they refer to a unified Umbrian identity (pp. 21–2). Such an image is not supported by the material from the region itself, where, even in the fourth and third centuries BC, evidence points to a number of separate ‘ethnés’, or rather individual communities which became more defined as a cohesive group toward the end of the millennium (pp. 23–8). Autonomy of distinct communities is indicated in the epigraphic record, especially in the Iguvine Tables (pp. 23–7), through individual coinage systems, as well as standards of weights and measures (pp. 183–7). Also, the culture and language of the region do not appear to be homogeneous (p. 137). Furthermore, evidence of treaties (p. 122) and alliances in the fourth and third centuries BC shows that communities acted independently (pp. 112–13). At times,
self-defence did necessitate joint action by the autonomous communities, progressively more so as external threat increased with the coming of Roman power. This may have activated a sense of collective identity (pp. 122–5). In the earlier, pre-conquest period the difficulty is in distinguishing between the actions of individual groups coming together for military purposes, in a body such as a league, and activities of communities which were based around other shared socio-cultural ties. What is clear is that the two do not necessarily overlap (pp. 123–4). Collective identity would have been greatly encouraged by Umbrian services in the Roman army, where they would have often fought together in an ethnic bloc (p. 199). Nevertheless, Bradley argues that we should not see the conquest period as a complete destruction of multiple identities. Rome could still make treaties with individual communities in the region, rather than the Umbrian people as a whole (pp. 120–2) and even as late as the Social War in 91 BC it appears that only some of the Umbrians joined the Italian allies in a fight against Rome.

The second chapter, ‘Umbria Before the Roman Conquest’ (pp. 29–102), covers the period from 900–300 BC and lays out the main theories which will continue to be tested and followed through subsequent periods in the rest of the work. It points to the lengthy and varied process of state formation (p. 29) and draws attention to the ‘unsatisfactory nature of urbanism as the predominant diagnostic index of early Italian societies’ (p. 29). Bradley indicates that within the Mediterranean and in Umbria itself there was a variety of state types, especially between the upland and lowland areas. Systems of hill forts and villages in the uplands are primarily associated with ‘territorial states’ while settlements which appear to be more focused on larger centres in the lowlands form the basis of ‘city-states’.

When Roman power advanced into Umbria in the fourth century BC the process of state organisation was still ongoing (p. 262) and, while there may not have been a definitive end (p. 37), Bradley indicates that the situation in the region was quite different from that of Etruria and Latium, ‘where most city-states were already well developed by the time of the Roman conquest’ (p. 262). However, Bradley is careful to stress that ‘the difference between states at either end of the spectrum might also be less than we would predict’ (p. 59). He also argues that the different types of state need to be seen as operating contemporaneously, rather than as stages within an overarching hierarchy of state formation (pp. 59–62, 101), as is the case in other parts of Italy as well as in Greece (p. 33). In fact, it may be argued that even Rome can be considered a territorial state in a certain sense (p. 35).

Alongside a theoretical discussion of different models of state formation (pp. 42ff) Bradley goes on to present the more specific, primarily archaeological and epigraphic material (including the later inscription – the Iguvine Tables), which is the key evidence for the settlement patterns and economy of the Iron-Age communities. He suggests that transhumance, which is dependent on shared land and rights of passage, may
have played a role in the formation of a sense of ethnicity (p. 50). Lines of hill forts may also be connected to the protection of pastures and routes (p. 54). However, these sites should not only be seen as protective installations, because they also contain evidence of more permanent settlement (pp. 56–9). In trying to define these hill fort systems, Bradley indicates that, in practice, it is difficult to differentiate between them and models of city-states (p. 59).

Another prominent feature of the Italic socio-political landscape was the religious sanctuary (pp. 62–77). Such sites played an important role in state formation and are indicative of the level of social complexity and the rise of the élite class from the seventh and sixth century BC. This development is also paralleled by the evidence in cemeteries (especially pp. 92–6). Bradley argues that, as in other regions of Italy, and also in the Greek world, in Umbria sanctuaries need to be seen as playing more than just a religious role. There is enough evidence to indicate that some sanctuaries also served as political centres for individual states. Bradley considers whether such ritual sites held this type of role within the settlement pattern referred to as *paganico-vicanico* (pp. 63–5), associated with ‘non-urbanised, regions’, such as the central Appennines. He concludes that ‘the close link between a certain type of sanctuary that appears in the archaic period and a *paganico-vicanico* settlement pattern is too simplistic’ (pp. 64–5).

To this, I would add that *pagus* and *vicus* are complex and not necessarily a continuation of a pre-Roman Italic tradition, but, rather, terms adopted in the Roman period to distinguish particular administrative units. Therefore they should be used with caution when considering pre-Roman settlement patterns. Bradley’s subsequent narrative goes on to examine the different roles which Umbrian rural sanctuaries may have had in upland and lowland zones. The discussion is important but somewhat complex and unclear. Perhaps a topographic map, specifically for this section, indicating where the sanctuaries were and their relationship to known settlements, would have made it easier to understand such terms as ‘peak sanctuaries’ (for example, p. 66). The question arises whether these are particular to uplands, lowlands or both, and whether they are different from mountain-top sanctuaries.

For Bradley, the development of social complexity is tied to the beginnings of urbanisation from the fifth century BC (p. 81). The tendency toward urban centres is seen as an indicator of transformation, which escalates with Roman conquest, as urban implantations, in the form of colonies and municipia [urban settlements], spread across the Umbrian landscape. While Roman-initiated settlements, which began to be created in the fourth century BC, are perhaps easier to identify and categorise as urban, identifying an ‘urban’ process within Italic settlements, especially those in the upland area, is much more difficult. The elements which Bradley distinguishes as exemplifying...
such a process are: the creation of monumental structures and public spaces (p. 82); the construction of fortification walls (p. 77); and the decline in the use of rural sanctuaries at the end of the first millennium BC (p. 173). With regards to the latter point, Bradley does indicate that some sanctuaries do continue through the period of Roman conquest and even flourish (pp. 172–3). In Umbria, as in other parts of Italy, the creation of monumental structures and public spaces in the fourth century BC is identified as an ‘urbanising’ trend, which follows Greco-Roman patterns, or rather, as Bradley further clarifies (after Coarelli), a trend which absorbs Greek influences now mediated through Rome (p. 227). What is meant by the term ‘urban’, however, is questionable, as is the explanation of how physical processes may reflect other societal changes and relations between the members of that community (a subject touched on in Chapter Four). Recent studies dismiss the usefulness of ‘urban’ checklists. But, even if a certain type of building activity can be taken as a sign of making settlements into ‘cities’, the construction of fortification walls, which Bradley sees as an indicator of urbanisation, poses a larger problem (pp. 77–83). What is missing is any in-depth discussion of the military function of these walls, although it is briefly noted that the immediate motive for wall construction at Asisium may (or may not) have been the threat of Hannibal’s invasion (p. 167). There also needs to be further consideration of a possible difference of purpose of these structures in lowland and upland sites, and between hill forts and ‘cities’. A fundamental problem of fortifications in Umbria, which perhaps hinders such discussion, is that most walls have not had full archaeological investigation, and the dates are primarily based on wall construction techniques – which, as Bradley himself points out, are not reliable (p. 163). Fortifications become a prominent feature of many Italic regions, and in the Mediterranean as a whole, in the fourth century BC (can they be seen as a cultural trend?), hence their rise in Umbria needs to be considered in a broader context, perhaps using studies from other regions with better dating, as models.

Chapter Three, ‘The Roman Conquest and Colonisation of Umbria’ (pp. 103–54), focuses on the late fourth and third centuries BC. Bradley begins by summarising the information which can be gained from written sources (especially Livy and Polybius) indicating the difficulties in using these texts, whose approach is primarily Roman-centric and hence selective (pp. 103–7). The following two sections (pp. 107–28) look at the role of Umbrian communities in military campaigns, as well as the nature of alliances and treaties. Other than analysing and revising the traditional narrative of the period, Bradley also uses the evidence, in particular that of treaties (pp. 120–8), to further stress the individual nature of the communities in Umbria. However, it is also clear that they did join together (although not necessarily all of them) for military

5 See, for example, Horden and Purcell 2000, especially pp. 89–122.
purposes (p. 122). By careful examination of the nature of these treaties, Bradley indicates that ‘there seems to be little sign that they (the Romans) preferred city-states over non-urbanised states. In fact, the opposite to this sort of policy seems to have been the case’ (p. 127). He also points to the internal tensions which may have arisen along class lines, where the élite appear to have supported Rome (p. 136). The effects of Roman conquest and colonisation on the region’s organisation and settlement patterns are examined in the following two sections (pp. 128–44). The image created is of diversity in Roman action, depending on the geography of particular areas, on whether they were needed strategically to control important trade and military routes, or on whether there was particularly fertile land to be used for veteran settlement.

The final section of Chapter Three (pp. 145–51) focuses on the period of the Hannibalic Wars. Of particular interest is the Telamon campaign in 225 BC since the Greek historian Polybius (2.24) provides a detailed record of the Italic forces called on by Rome. He gives not only their numbers but also their breakdown into ethnic contingents. Bradley uses this information as a starting point to investigate the Umbrian contribution to the war – which shows that the Umbrians were one of the smallest allied contingents (p. 147) – and also to estimate the relative population of the region of Umbria, which Bradley indicates was augmented by some 30 per cent as a result of Roman settlement by 225 BC (p. 148). The chapter concludes with an observation that, even with the heavy Roman infiltration into the region, the overall state organisation of Umbria was little altered at this point (p. 154).

Chapter Four, ‘Urbanism and Society in Umbria Between the Conquest and the Social War’ (pp. 155–89), considers both the changes and persisting trends in the region during the second century BC. Bradley examines the relationship between urban centres and rural sanctuaries to investigate how central authority functioned and developed in Umbrian communities. From the third century BC onwards, there is evidence of monumental construction in Umbrian settlements, particularly, it would appear, in conjunction with sacred buildings – partly indicated by the use of architectural terracottas, although as direct evidence for public buildings they are somewhat problematic (pp. 158–63). Indicating the existence of similar trends in other regions of Italy, Bradley suggests that in Umbrian communities too it is the aristocracy who construct monumental buildings as signs of prestige expressing their power and levels of wealth (p. 162). The transformations during the second century BC show that the élites of even small Umbrian communities ‘might be both wealthy and affected by wider Hellenistic trends’ (p. 168). For Bradley, the diversification of élite practice is one of the key elements which signals a key development in state organisation. This is discernible through the appearance of prestigious goods in distinct tombs during the pre-conquest period (pp. 37, 93–6) and after the conquest, monumentalisation of structures within settlements and sanctuaries (pp. 162, 172–3, 250). Bradley is careful not to associate the growth of élite power directly with the causes of transformation
but, rather, terms it a ‘symptom’ indicating the ambiguity of the relationship between
the two phenomena (pp. 37, 249). While there is enough evidence to suggest a growth
of élite power, it is not clear why monumentalisation within sanctuaries and settlements
is necessarily a result of the energies of the élite members of society, especially in the
erlier periods, nor why the creation of such structures was necessarily intended as
a sign of élite power. The possibility (and perhaps its negation) that there existed
communal decisions, as well as funds, to create new structures needs to be brought
into the argument.

The prominence of the Umbrian élite is most clearly seen in the period of Roman
conquest. There is evidence to suggest that some communities were split along class
lines, where local aristocrats, as for example at Nequinum in 299 BC, may have helped
the Romans in conquering their own settlements (pp. 114, 136). Bradley indicates that
the situation may be similar to that of Naples where, according to Livy (8.25–7), in
326 BC the Romans were supported by the aristocracy. It would be interesting to
investigate this further and consider the consequences of such class divisions within
communities, and assess Rome’s role in encouraging them. The reality of such divisions
also needs to be questioned, as most of the evidence for them comes from Livy who,
writing several centuries after the events, may be projecting on the past the situation
in his own time, as well as putting forward explanations that would justify Roman
actions. If they did exist, how did they impinge on identity where ties along ‘class’
lines may have overridden those of communal allegiance?

In the subsequent two sections (pp. 178–87), Bradley uses the primarily epigraphic
evidence to define the nature of the political system. Diverse magisterial titles, and
terms relating to communal organisation, suggest variety in the way Umbrian
communities were organised (pp. 182–3). The available evidence also points to ‘a
society that has defined groups and designated representatives with authority over
the community’ (p. 182). The combined sources indicate that the beginnings of state
organisation in Umbria can be traced to at least the sixth century BC (p. 189).

Chapter Five, ‘Romanisation, the Social War, and Integration into the Roman
State’ (pp. 190–245), focuses on the first century BC and looks forward to the Imperial
period. Through various themes the chapter’s aim is to explore in what way, and to
what extent, there was a shift in the Umbrian sense of identity. In the first sections
(pp. 190–200), Bradley takes on the problematic concept of ‘Romanisation’. This
overarching term is taken apart point by point and rather than trying toanalyse certain
trends as to whether they are or are not signs of Romanisation, the discussion is taken
to a different level. Having already highlighted the dangers of using changes in material
culture to identify shifts in ethnic identity (pp. 99–100), he goes on to examine how
the changing trends in material culture can be interpreted. The meaning of Romanisation
is designated specifically for the region of Umbria which can be summarised as follows:
the creation of new road networks; Roman settlements and centuriation; participation
of the Umbrian élite in the Roman senate; and the use of Umbrian contingents in the Roman army. Unlike traditional theories, which suggest the replacement of one (indigenous) identity with another (Roman), Bradley argues for the coexistence of several identities in ancient Italian communities (p. 200) and the addition of a supra-state identity (p. 268). The subsequent two sections (pp. 200–17) follow the transformations in material culture and language within Umbria. The changes in pottery and votives from the fourth century BC indicate an adoption of a more central Italic culture, with Rome as its focus (p. 203). The epigraphic record in Umbria, however, suggests a more dramatic shift with the use of Latin taking over from Umbrian on inscriptions in the first century BC (pp. 214–15). Epigraphy, however, may not be indicative of the oral use of the Umbrian language in the region, but rather points to the weakness of the native epigraphic tradition (pp. 205–9). Most importantly, Bradley’s discussion forces us to see Umbria, Rome and other Italian communities as part of a larger whole and as products of far wider-reaching influences and interactions where identities have fluid borders (pp. 255–7, 268), rather than operating as isolated units.

In the following sections Bradley proceeds to analyse the extent of Umbrian involvement in the Social War (pp. 217–21) and the changes which followed (pp. 221–39). Both the Umbrians and the Etruscans were incited to join the Italian contingents against Rome and there is evidence to suggest that at least some Umbrians did fight (p. 218), but in the end their role in the conflict was very small and, by 90 BC, Umbrians along with many other Italian communities accepted Roman citizenship. Municipalisation of the region followed, and with it increased building activity (pp. 221–7). Bradley indicates that, while this attention to new centres may have been one of the reasons for the further decline of rural sanctuaries (pp. 227–9), it should not be seen as part of a general rural decline in this period, since there is evidence that villas flourished in the countryside in the first century BC (pp. 229–30).

There were, of course, also areas which did suffer with the coming of Rome, lands were confiscated and settlements destroyed. Despite this, however, inclusion of Umbria in the Roman state clearly benefited the élite of the region (pp. 236–9), who rapidly adopted Roman culture (indicated in the epigraphic record and funerary forms), and, most significantly, produced the largest number of Roman senators of all allied regions (p. 236). But we should not assume that, from this point on, all traces of Umbrian identity disappeared. Bradley does stress that ‘by the late first century BC the ethnic groups of Italy had become both politically defunct and culturally indistinguishable’ (p. 240), but nevertheless, the notion of a distinct Umbrian construct, even if geographically rather than ethnically based, survived into the imperial period (pp. 241–5).

Chapter Six, ‘Umbria in Italy; Some Comparisons and Conclusions’ (pp. 246–69), has two strands running through it. In an effort to place Umbria in the context of
Italy, Bradley includes a discussion of another Italic group, the Picentes. Unlike the communities in Umbria, the Picentes appear to be less differentiated as a group. Their ethnic cohesion may also influence how they are treated by Rome and respond to Roman conquest and models (pp. 257–62). While clearly this is very useful, it is perhaps somewhat premature as the evidence for the region still needs the same amount of careful work and analysis as Bradley himself has done for Umbria. What is evident from Bradley’s discussion is that, with continuing gathering and analysis of evidence of the Picentes, a meaningful comparison can be formed with Umbrian communities. The limited evidence available indicates that the history of the Picene region is as complicated as that of Umbria, and also different from it. Bradley’s other comparisons throughout the work with better known regions of Italy, such as Samnium and Etruria, are more appropriate and constructive. This comparison with Picenum reiterates the key themes of the work, in particular the plurality and complexity of identities in Umbria and in Italy as a whole. Bradley further stresses that, when considering changes which come about as a result of the infiltration of an imperial power, such as Rome, we must be careful not to obscure other external influences as well as internal dynamics within the particular region which can also bring about change (pp. 268–9).

Bradley’s work includes four appendices which bring together the different forms of evidence referred to throughout the work. Appendix 1 is a listing, by site name, of ‘Architectural Terracottas and Temple Podia in the Sixth Augustan Region (Umbria) in the First Millennium BC’ (pp. 270–80). Appendix 2, ‘Umbrian Inscriptions’ (pp. 281–93), lists the entries by provenance and usefully includes the text of most of the inscriptions (not the Iguvine Tables). Appendix 3 is a collection of ‘Latin Inscriptions Dating to Before the Social War’ (pp. 294–300), organised differently than Appendix 2 but also by provenance and also including the original texts. The fourth Appendix is a list of ‘Firmly Attested Treaties Formed by Rome During the Conquest of Italy, 338–264 BC’ (p. 301), organised in order of the date when each treaty was formed, with references to textual and epigraphic evidence. On the whole, having this information collated in the different appendices is helpful, but they are difficult to use. In Appendix 1, which includes architectural terracottas and temple podia, the sites are listed in chronological order. This is not particularly helpful, as for example even the first two sites – Mevania and Ocricum – have remains dating from the seventh and sixth centuries BC to the second and first centuries BC (p. 271). The collection of ‘Umbrian Inscriptions’ in Appendix 2, organised by provenance, is also not listed alphabetically, nor chronologically. These layouts make it difficult to find the specific sections which the text refers to. While the intention may have been to encourage the readers to create their own connections, the layout of the appendices makes that difficult.

But these small problems should not take away from Bradley’s commendable work, which is essential for our understanding of the communities of ancient Italy.
Methodologically, Bradley’s work bridges the gap between history and archaeology and begins to incorporate elements of anthropological research, which currently only have a small role in the writing of ancient history. By bringing together a wide variety of material from disparate sources, he makes it accessible and intelligible to what may not be a specialist audience. The models he proposes now need to be tested through the continuing study of other regions. Bradley’s work has clearly shown the gaps in our image of Italy and the possibilities available to fill them.

References


Jeans


Term for a type of pant – and more. The phenomenon of Jeans is paradigmatic of how inseparable an object-history is from the realm of the imaginary. Jeans can only be grasped as a node of diverse interests, strategies and attributions that overlap and stand in contradiction with one another. The history of Jeans is at heart a history of acceptance and refusal with respect to Fordist society. The dialectics of the relation becomes particularly tangible in the history of Jeans in the German Democratic Republic.

1. The history of Jeans begins in the mid-nineteenth century in California. A robust, indigo-coloured cotton from Nîmes, denim ('de Nîmes') was imported via Genoa (French ‘Gênes’, hence English ‘jeans’) for the manufacture of a work pant durable enough for the needs of the gold-miners. For several decades, Jeans remained primarily a work pant for agricultural workers and ranchers, but they had already begun to acquire a complex imaginary significance. Beginning around 1910, denim overalls and Jeans contributed to the articulation of film as ‘a specifically American art form’ (Schober 2001, 85). As the war-production clothing of American women during World War I, denim overalls came to be the ‘emphatically brandished sign of the acceptance of national strategies’ (116). After the War, artists’ colonies and drop-out groups emerged, positioning Jeans for the first time as anti-fashion and oppositional culture (118). According to information released by the firm Levi Strauss, which proliferates the ‘history’ of Jeans as a mix of marketing and myth, Jeans made their way into the cities during the Great Depression of the 1930s by means of still-solvent city dwellers who had availed themselves of the new dude ranch vacations hosted by farms and ranches threatened by ruin. They took the pants they discovered there back home with them. The documentary photographers of the Depression era contracted by the Roosevelt administration disseminated the image of impoverished farmers and unemployed industrial workers as suffering Everymen of a largely Jeans-wearing populace, who, like film figures of the 1930s (e.g. Grapes of Wrath), were presented as ‘American’ and ‘social-planning-progressive’ (140). Leftist intellectuals of the period identified themselves by wearing Jeans, among others the exiled Bertolt Brecht (162).

The breakthrough to its paradoxical existence as a uniform of those striving to set themselves apart, as a medium between identity and identification, as a mass phenomenon, came in the 1950s. Rebel films such as The Wild One (USA 1954) proliferated a Jeans image that quickly elevated Jeans to the trademark of the teenage dropout par excellence. This fad soon made its way to Europe as well, launching the ‘rowdy [Halbstarken]’ discourse in both German states, culminating on occasion in a mass brawl (for example at the 1958 Bill Haley concert in Berlin). Jeans became the symbol of a youth stylised as ‘rowdies’. In the GDR as well, where the very word ‘Jeans’ was so provocative that, even as late as the early 1970s, in the context of developing the domestic production of Jeans, specialists in the garment industry were instructed to use the term ‘double-stitched fell-seam pants’ rather than ‘Jeans’ (Kramer 2002, 129). In the FRG as well, wearing Jeans was considered by some to be an indicator of a ‘cultural decline resulting from “Americanisation”’ (Schober 2001, 216). In the West, the subculturalisation of Jeans reached its apex in the late 1960s and early 1970s. They were held to be the typical pant of US-American hippies and opponents of the Vietnam War – despite the fact that members of fraternities and supporters of the War also wore them. Wearing Jeans (in the US especially in combination with granny specs and a blue work-shirt) became the
brand-mark of leftist American, later European, students.
In the countries of the Comecon, Jeans were a hot item among the youth and in young intellectual circles. As long as they could only be procured from foreign countries in the West (via friends or relatives who lived or were permitted to travel there), demand reached such proportions that, in the Soviet Union, a pair of Levis Jeans would sometimes sell for a full month’s salary – a late and rather ironic fulfilment of the proclamation of the revolutionary artist ‘Varst’ (Varvara Stepanova), who in 1923 wrote, ‘contemporary clothing is the work overall [Proz distraction]’ (quoted in Schober 2001, 15). A truce in the battle against Jeans in the GDR was called in the 1970s. Manfred Wekwerth recalls a satirical poem that he and others composed on the occasion of the Sixth Party Congress of the Socialist Unity Party (the ruling party of the GDR): ‘In the poem, we congratulated the Party on the heroic struggles that it had waged to attain many a lofty goal. In 1948 against the dangerous striped sock, “an expression of American freeloading and a dandy-attitude”, until our labour force succeeded in producing even more colourful socks, celebrating them as an expression of our unbroken joie de vivre. Then in 1950, the war against “rivet pants” (Niethosen, i.e. Jeans) as “the expression of American barbarism in the realm of the garment and ideological subversion of our youth”, until our people’s-own industry itself became capable of producing this “typical garment of the American working class” in good quality under the brand name “Sonnierde”, thereby satisfying the “natural needs of our young people for practical clothing”’ (2000, 204). The breakthrough to Socialist acceptability ran parallel to the shift of the image of the Jeans-wearing Westerner from rowdy to Vietnam War opponent (Kramer 2002, 141 et sqq.). But even in the 1970s, when Jeans were being successfully produced in the Comecon, the brand-name Jeans of the West continued to be a prestige currency. The Jeans wave, having captured the masses, there surpassed even the popularity of the pants in the West (where sales sporadically dropped drastically) – so that, in retrospect, it is not so much the USA as the GDR that will be remembered as ‘the Jeans-wearing country par excellence’ (Hahn 2002).

2. Our concern here, though, is not Jeans as a garment nor their system-transcending popularity, nor even their paradoxical ability to signal individuality as a mass consumption article, nor their demonstrated potency as an object of capital valorisation in the garment industry. Rather: the way those things interconnect. Closer examination shows the Jeans phenomenon to be complex. It is not without irony that the article of clothing that, at least at certain times, was considered to be the symbol of opposition, of dropping out, of protest per se, should be the leading object of capital valorisation in the history of the clothing industry. By 1989, the firm Lee alone had used enough denim in the production of Jeans to cover all of Italy, including the Alps (FAZ, 29.3.1989, 18) and the firm Levi Strauss had six years earlier already sold twice as many Jeans (The General Merchandizing Magazine, Sept. 1984). The anti-hero Edgar Wibeau of The New Sorrows of Young W. (Plenzdorf 1979, 14) put it succinctly and accurately: Jeans is an attitude, not a pair of pants. The marketing division of Levi Strauss came out with an ad in 1984 asserting that the ‘signal’ of Jeans is the expression of an attitude towards life.

It would appear that the tough weave of Jeans consists of Gordian knots. Celebrated social theorists have attempted, on the multiply occupied terrain of cultural studies, to untie them. The topic requires interdisciplinary analysis, and it tempts the analyst to cross the boundary to the anecdotal; everybody has a Jeans story to tell. Time and again, you think you have grasped it, but the hand turns out to be empty.

Those who have taken on the challenge of investigating Jeans culture – or, more precisely, the social phenomenon it embodies in such exemplary fashion – have contributed in varying degrees to our understanding. In 1973, Pier Paolo Pasolini concerned himself with the phenomenon in the context of a linguistic analysis of an advertisement of the brand Jesus-Jeans: ‘You shall have no other Jeans before me.’ This ironic blasphemous rendering of the First Com-
mandment is, for Pasolini, symptomatic of the new ‘worldliness’ in neo-capitalist society, that needs ‘consumers with an exclusively pragmatic and hedonistic mentality’ and tolerates the continued presence of religion ‘merely as the natural basis for mass consumption and exploitable folklore’ (1975/1998, 31 et sq) – a condition he criticises as ‘hedonistic fascism’. The resounding outrage of the Vatican over this advertising slogan was not only helpless, as Pasolini asserted, but also cynical: The factory in which Jesus Jeans were produced belonged to the Catholic Church (Haug 1987, 160).

In the most productive approach to date, Wolfgang Fritz Haug treats Jeans as an exemplary phenomenon whose analysis requires theoretical clarification of the relationship between ideology theory and commodity aesthetics in the context of the study of culture. Ideology theory distinguishes between ‘horizontal’ disciplines – i.e. conceptions of behaviour necessary for life that are articulated in association, that modify the unmediated driving motivations for individual action and further the maintenance and development of the capacity to act – and ‘vertical’ disciplines (1980, 126) conducted by overriding powers with the intent of socialising the individuals in ‘ideal socialisation from above’ (126; see PIT 1979, 181). Through their instantiations, the ‘ideological powers’ try to move ‘individuals to the “voluntary” adoption of their activity-regulators and thereby to inner subjugation’ (126; Haug calls this process ideological subject-effect – the subjectivising of power relations by the individuals.

In the case of commodity aesthetics, the primary issue is not socialisation but rather the satisfaction of needs, specifically in the mode of the use-value promise. This fundamental category of commodity aesthetics requires subjective realisation: it is not the use-value itself that triggers the act of purchase, but rather the believed promise of use-value. Under investigation is the type of promise, given the ‘form in which commodity aesthetics gives use-value to be understood’ (129), in the first instance, as the body of the commodity. With Klaus Holzkamp (1973, 25 et sqq.), Haug calls the way the body of the commodity ‘gives itself to be understood as use-value’ (ibid.) its ‘object-meaning’; the object-meaning does not represent the use-value (like advertising, packaging, etc.), it presents it – whereby, contrary to being identical with it, it is separable from it. That is, the object redoubles into the object and the appearance that is constituted, in accordance with general cultural codes, for that use-value. This process is not ideological, either. In the era of monopoly commodities, a new semiological structure, one that resembles the ideological, emerges: the signifying characteristics of the commodity body no longer denominate merely the presence-representation of culturally defined use-values but at the same time the valorising capital as well, that ‘over the heads of the merchants . . . addresses the population of purchasers directly (Haug 1980, 131). The use-value promise of the commodity enjoys thereby both a rear wind and an open road; the aesthetics of the monopoly commodity erect around the body of the commodity an ‘imaginary space’ (132) and ‘initiate thereby not only the connotations of characteristics or values, but also the imagination of wishful acts, more precisely of satisfaction acts’ (ibid.). Just which needs are invoked are extraneous to this structure; the prerequisite is simply that ‘their satisfaction can be imaginatively linked to a specific commodity’ (ibid.). The imaginary spaces can be understood as activity spaces – they ‘urge the production of “thought films” in the form of half-conscious, fragmentary wish-dreams’ (133). While the commodity is being used they induce a commensurate ‘meaning-activity’ (ibid.).

Commodity aesthetics in this instance behave in a mode analogous to the ideological in an Althusserian sense: they ‘organise imaginary relations of the individuals to certain objective conditions of their lives’ (133 et sq). Haug grasps the thing hereby imagined as self-identity and investigates it with the reflexive socialisation mechanism articulated by George Herbert Mead as the ‘generalised other’; its “gaze” and my “image” become factors of my identity (134). The communicated need-satisfaction functions thereby as ‘prescriptive appearance or ideal in the eyes
of the generalised other’; and this becomes a ‘compulsively desired appearance . . . by virtue of the fact that social integration and identity adhere to it’ (ibid.). This aesthetic subjugation, analogous to the ideological, can be characterised as the subject effect of commodity aesthetics, that, similar to the ideological, become the agency of ‘alienated socialisation’ (137) in the realm of the socio-aesthetic. Its power derives from private isolation. As an alternative, Haug describes how organised or informal, culturally resourceful collectives – often subcultures in the sense of ‘insubordination cultures’ (137 et sq.) – rework the imaginary material and integrate it into identities that bear the imprint of real collectives.

The power of jeans culture originates for Haug in the way it strikes a compromise between the insubordination culture and the mass culture organised by the mass media and the monopolies (137). Behaviour and attitudes/assumptions of individuals can, to be sure, be differentiated analytically in that charged field between capital interest and insubordination culture, but they do not represent different modes of behaving, but rather a single behaviour beset with contradictions.

Instead of the intersection point between the ideological and the commodity-aesthetic hereby revealed, one encounters in the older literature anthropologically conceived fashion characteristics in their historical modes of appearance – from pomp to protest, so to speak – often spiced with common sense and naïveté. For example, in the case of John Carl Flügel (1930), who, on the one hand, seems numbed by the ‘mystery’ of fashion and, on the other, reduces it to simple truisms of the sort: ‘It is obvious . . . that in dealing with fashion, we have to consider not only the individual creators of clothes but the group mentality of those who wear them’ (148). Even Thorstein Veblen, whose critique of the ‘leisure class’ introduced such potent descriptions as ‘conspicuous consumption’ (1899, Chapter 4) and moved the discussion of fashion into the proximity of economics, produced, in the words of Theodor W. Adorno, ‘a critique not of political economy, but rather of its non-economic life. The perpetual recourse to psychology and habits of thought as a means of explaining economic realities is not compatible with the Marxian objective law of value’ (GS 10.1, 75), whereby the ‘attempt to grasp the antagonisms in the process of human adaptation that [Veblen] conceives pragmatically does bring dialectical motives to the surface. His thinking is an amalgam of positivism and historical materialism’ (76).

And whereas Quentin Bell (1947) contributes rich material to the theme of fashion and, instead of generalising it anthropologically, conceives of it as a socio-historically conditioned behaviour of European humans, he fails to isolate its socio-aesthetic mainspring.

In wider circles of the leftist movements of the 1960s and 1970s, jeans were frequently chosen as the exemplary object for analysing alienation phenomena in ‘consumer society’. Günther Anders, for example, concerns himself with this ‘historico-philosophically so fascinating pant’ (1980, 284), specifically with the paradoxical instance of ‘manufactured poor quality’, i.e. pants that are produced as frayed or patched; only yesterday-ness is ‘up to date’. But he erodes the contradiction between subjective use-value and objective characteristics when he insists upon a presumed ‘flat’ of ‘collective fashion’ (ibid.). What is interesting is not that a garment becomes a uniform; noteworthy are the mediating instances whereby the drop-out impulse and commodity-aesthetically facilitated capital valorisation enable one another.

Anna Schober concerns herself with the same paradox Anders addresses and describes thereby succinctly what so often fascinates European theorists about the jeans phenomenon: Jeans are used ‘in order to stand out unmistakably from the crowd while they simultaneously offer us an opportunity to immerse ourselves in the crowd’ (2001, 9). The foremost object of her attention, though, is a reflexive phenomenon that at first appears to bear resemblance with the complex of effects analysed by Haug. The potency that emerges around jeans bears witness to the fact that in the twentieth century we increasingly find out who we are and where we stand by seeking out images and commodities and transforming them into self-images (ibid.) The approach
is promising, but the attempt to grasp the reflexive mechanism falls short. The foreground here is occupied by ‘aspirations, wishes, fears, and utopias that take up residence in the blue pants in respective use contexts’ (10); we create ‘personifications of ourselves in that we seek domicile in an object, a detail, an image’ (9). Metaphors of a homelessness of the soul reveal a point of departure that is incapable of grasping the social phenomenon; the mechanism gets mired in its instantiation, the phenomenon of the Jeans cult per se. But despite the fact that Schober’s book does not dispose of analytical instruments adequate to achieving the goal she sets, it is a rich source for the study of Jeans culture as an example of the interconnections articulated by Haug.

The generational conflicts between youths (‘rowdies’, ‘hippies’) and adults (parents, good citizens, ‘Babbitts’) formed a specific conflict zone from the 1950s until the 1970s in which Jeans developed into a widely understood symbol for a non-conforming counter-culture. According to Thomas Barfuss, this evidenced an ‘un-mixing of bizarrely combined consciousness in generations’, i.e. ‘more or less complementarily structured forms of integration… that enable the subjects to exist in and to generalise the Fordist postwar order under the conditions of inequality and non-contemporaneity that are characteristic of the process of capitalist modernization’ (2002, 156). That does not mean that the process of a disputed symbolisation came to an end with the crisis of Fordism and the commodification of hippie and good citizen (10); the meaning of an article of clothing is not writ in stone. But its ‘mythology’ (Barthes) is not random. Not all things are do-able, at least not all at once; the functionalisation via anti/politics is not set for all time. The appearance and meaning of Jeans have multiplied and morphed many times over. Levis 501s have had ‘more influence and meaning in more places than any other single item of clothing known to man’ (Bedford Times-Mail, Nov. 30, 1981). This expresses itself qualitatively therein, that not only an attitude of dissidence from ‘below’ defines itself through Jeans, but also an attitude of apparent independence from these constraints establishes itself from ‘above’: the careerist, who attempts by means of this symbol to represent a ‘different difference’; s/he does not wear a worn-out pair of blue Jeans but perhaps designer Jeans, and maybe even icons them. The Jeans-dominated 1970s retro of the 2001–2 season was not a drop-out retro. It is telling that the German feature film Jeans (Nicola Kribitz, 2002) has virtually nothing to do with Jeans pants; the film is about narcissisms, the meeting and passing-in-the-night of Berlin singles – as though the mere reference to Jeans in the title suffices to thematise the symbolic processes on which Jeans, too, thrive.

The way in which sexuality is encoded in Jeans is multiply occupied as well; that Jeans revealed the contours of the male member contributed to the early scandals that surrounded the pant in the post-war period (compare in particular the dust cover of the Rolling Stones album, Sticky Fingers). In certain periods, at least, gay men signalled their identity by wearing Jeans. In the words of Jean Genet: ‘Jeans that fit so snugly around the butts and thighs of the young guys were erotic and pure at once, so beautiful was the harmony between the beauty of the lines and the darkness of the night’ (Prisoner of Love; quoted in Schober, 235).

The ambiguity of the sexual reference of Jeans in the famous photo of a young auto mechanic, ‘Fred with Tires’ (Herb Ritts, 1984) is as flagrant as it is subtle. A thin but muscular young man with a naked torso wearing enormously oversized, tattered jeans filthy with grease, twists half toward the camera to exaggerate the sinews, in each hand a tire. The sexual references are ambivalent: a he-man beyond doubt, but the crotch of his pants, that cover the genital without concealing it, has taken on the contour of a vaginal slit through multiple patching; this form is repeated in the worn tread of the tire that he holds in his left hand, split by a long tear. At the same time, this image quotes the photos of the Farm Security Administration of the Roosevelt era – poverty without shame, embedded in the national belief in progress: In his right hand, Fred holds a new tire that will replace the old one. This photo was not taken in the Dust Bowl era, however, but in postmodern Hollywood.
Ironically, it is precisely the vested standpoint of exchange-value that, by means of the commodity aesthetics of monopoly goods, provides the insubordination culture with a medium of expression. Not only did the insubordination culture transform the meaning of Jeans; it was precisely the monopoly character of Jeans that enabled them to function as mediator of a supranational culture ‘from below’.


Karen Ruoff Kramer

abstract labour, Americanism, aesthetics, aesthetic abstraction, need, satisfaction, picture, alienation, Fordism, use-value, promise of use-value, counterculture, identity, identification, ideology theory, imaginary, individuality, individual, instance, conformism, consumer/user, consumer society, culture, cultural studies, mass culture, fashion, monopoly, myth, sexuality, subalternity, sub-culture, subject effect, symbol, socialisation, refusal, commodity aesthetics, advertising

abstrakte Arbeit, Amerikanismus, Ästhetik, ästhetische Abstraktion, Bedürfnis, Befriedigung, Bild, Entfremdung, Fordismus, Gebrauchswert, Geschäftswirtschaft, Kultur, Konsument, Konsumgesellschaft, Kultur, Konsumstudien, Massenkultur, Mode, Monopol, Mythos, Sexualität, Subalternität, Subkultur, Subjekt-Effekt, Symbol, Vergesellschaftung, Verweigerung, Warenästhetik, Werbung
Notes on Contributors

Sam Ashman teaches International Development at the University of East London and is a member of the editorial board of Historical Materialism.

s.j.ashman@uel.ac.uk

Mark Bould is a Senior Lecturer in Film Studies at the University of the West of England. He is an associate editor of Historical Materialism, Horror: The International Journal of Horror Studies and Science Fiction Studies, the author of Film Noir: From Berlin to Sin City (2005) and The Cinema of John Sayles (2007) and a co-editor of Parietal Games: Critical Writings By and On M. John Harrison (2005). He is currently co-editing Neo-Noir and The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction.

mark.bould@uwe.ac.uk

Robert Brenner is Professor of History and Director of the Center for Social Theory and Comparative History at UCLA. He is the author of Merchants and Revolution (Verso 2003), The Boom and the Bubble (Verso 2002) and The Economics of Global Turbulence (Verso 2006).

rbrenner@ucla.edu

Alex Callinicos is Professor of European Studies at King’s College London. His most recent book is The Resources of Critique (Polity 2006).

alex.callinicos@kcl.ac.uk

Noel Castree is Professor in the School of Environment and Development at the University of Manchester. His main research interest is the political economy of environmental change.

noel.castree@manchester.ac.uk


bf@soas.ac.uk
Loren Goldner is an independent writer living in New York. His recent article on the defeat of the 2003–4 Los Angeles grocery strike was published in Black and Red Notes and translated into French, German, Italian and Czech. Much of his work is available on-line on the ‘Break Their Haughty Power’ website at <http://home.earthlink.net/lrgoldner>.

lrgoldner@yahoo.com

Peter Green teaches Economics and Development Studies at Westminster-Kingsway College and Birkbeck in London. He has been active in NATFHE and the Stop the War campaign. Work still in progress on Marx, Keynes and globalisation.

pg015d0215@blueyonder.co.uk

David Harvey is Distinguished Professor of Anthropology at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. He previously held positions at the Johns Hopkins University and Oxford University. He has written widely on political economy, urbanisation and cultural change. Recent books include A Brief History of Neoliberalism (Oxford University Press 2005) and Spaces of Global Capitalism, Towards a Geography of Uneven Development (Verso 2005).

dharvey@gc.cuny.edu

Elena Isayev is Lecturer in Ancient History in the Department of Classics and Ancient History at the University of Exeter. She works on methods of accessing histories through material culture and also on ancient youth and migration. She is the author of Hospitable Lucania: Histories of Communities in South-West Italy 4th–1st Century.

E.Isayev@ex.ac.uk

Karen Ruoff Kramer, a native of Compton, California, has lived and worked in Berlin / Brandenburg since 1970. Director of the Stanford University Berlin Study Center, she teaches theatre, film and cultural studies. Publications include The Politics of Discourse: Third Thoughts on New Subjectivity. Recent research focuses on films of the DEFA (gender, jeans culture, the aesthetics of concealed disclosure, etc.). She wrote the lyrics for E.G., a musical portrait of Emma Goldman and is a published bilingual poet (German and English). In 2002 she was awarded the Bundesverdienstkreuz am Bande (Federal Medal of Honour) for her contributions to German-American relations and to co-operation between Germans of the old and the new Länder.

kramer@stanford.fu-berlin.de


nlazarus@warwick.ac.uk
Michael A. Lebowitz is Professor Emeritus of Economics at Simon Fraser University in Canada. His Beyond ‘Capital’: Marx’s Political Economy of the Working Class (Palgrave, Macmillan 2003) won the Isaac and Tamara Deutscher Memorial Prize for 2004 and has been (or soon will be) published in Spanish, Chinese, Turkish and Portuguese language editions. His most recent book is Build it Now: Socialism for the 21st Century (Monthly Review Press 2006) and forthcoming one is Following Marx: The Method of Political Economy (HM Book Series, Brill Academic Press). At the moment he is working in Venezuela.

mlebowit@sfu.ca

Vincent Présumey is a revolutionary militant, member of the Parti socialiste and union representative in education. He has belonged to different currents of Trotskyism in France and is on the editorial committee of La Lettre des Liaisons. He has worked and written on the currents opposing the Left in the unions as well as the struggle for the unity of unions in the 1930s and more generally on the currents of revolutionary syndicalism and left reformism in France.

sv.presumey@wanadoo.fr

Bob Sutcliffe writes on questions of international political economy and development and has taught at universities in the UK, the US, Nicaragua and Spain. He is author of 100 Ways of Seeing an Unequal World (Zed 2001).

bosu@sarenet.es

Martin Thomas is a member of the editorial boards of the magazine Workers’ Liberty and the newspaper Solidarity. He is, most recently, the author of ‘Two Critiques: “Empire” and ‘New Imperialism’, in Workers’ Liberty 2, 3.

martin@workersliberty.org

Ellen Meiksins Wood taught at the Department of Political Science, University of York, Toronto, Canada between 1967 and 1996. She has extensively written on political theory, history of capitalism, globalisation and nation-states. Most recent works include The Origin of Capitalism: A Longer View (Verso 2002) and Empire of Capital (Verso 2003).

ellenwood@btinternet.com
Notice of Next Issue
Historical Materialism (volume 15, issue 1)

Article
CARLO VERCELLONE • From Formal Subsumption to General Intellect: Elements for a Marxist Reading of the Thesis of Cognitive Capitalism

Symposium:
Ernest Mandel and the Historical Theory of Global Capitalism
MARCEL VAN DER LINDEN AND JAN WILLEM STUTJE • Editorial Introduction
JAIRUS BANAJI • Islam, the Mediterranean and the Rise of Capitalism
PATRICK KARL O’BRIEN • Global Economic History as the Accumulation of Capital through a Process of Combined and Uneven Development. An Appreciation and Critique of Ernest Mandel
MICHAEL R. KRÄTKE • On the History and Logic of Modern Capitalism. The Legacy of Ernest Mandel
MARCEL VAN DER LINDEN • The ‘Law’ of Uneven and Combined Development: Some Underdeveloped Thoughts
JAN-WILLEM STUTJE • Concerning Der Spätkapitalismus: Mandel’s Quest for a Synthesis of Late Capitalism

Review Articles
SPENCER DIMMOCK on Jane Whittle’s The Development of Agrarian Capitalism: Land and Labour in Norfolk, 1440–1580
JOÃO BERNARDO on Alessandro Orsini’s L’Eretico della Sinistra. Bruno Rizzi Élitista Democratico
ANTHONY CHASE on the Leiden Journal of Internal Law’s ‘International Symposium on Marxism and International Law’
ALAN THORNETT on Ralph Darlington’s and Dave Lyddon’s Glorious Summer: Class Struggle in Britain in 1972

The Historical-Critical Dictionary of Marxism
PETER THOMAS • Historicism, Absolute

Notes on Contributors
Notice of Next Issue
Back Issues
Subscription Form
Back Issues

HISTORICAL MATERIALISM 1
Ellen Meiksins Wood on the non-history of capitalism • Colin Barker on Ellen Wood • Esther Leslie on Benjamin’s Arcades Project • John Weeks on underdevelopment • Tony Smith on theories of technology • Michael Lebowitz on the silences of Capital • John Holloway on alienation • Peter Burnham on globalisation and the state • Fred Moseley on the US rate of profit • reviews by Matthew Beaumont on Bloch • Benno Teschke on Guy Bois • Peter Linebaugh on Robin Blackburn

HISTORICAL MATERIALISM 2
China Miéville on architecture • Gregory Elliott on Perry Anderson • Andrew Chitty on recognition • Michael Neary & Graham Taylor on alchemy • Paul Burkett on neo-Malthusian Marxism • Slavoj Zizek on risk society • reviews by Geoff Kay on Freeman & Carchedi • Ben Watson on Adorno and music • Mike Haynes on the Russian Revolution • Elmar Altvater on David Harvey • Martin Jenkins on Althusser and psychoanalysis • Esther Leslie on Benjamin

HISTORICAL MATERIALISM 3
Symposium on Leninism and political organisation: Simon Clarke • Howard Chodos & Colin Hay • John Molyneux • Alan Shandro • Jonathan Joseph • Peter Hudis • John Ehrenberg • Plus Paul Burkett on Ted Benton • Werner Bonefeld on novelty • reviews by Michael Lebowitz on Felton Shortall • Gareth Dale on East Germany • Adrian Budd on Kim Moody • Giles Peaker on John Roberts • Chris Bertram on analytical Marxism • Ken Hammond on Vietnam

HISTORICAL MATERIALISM 4
Symposium on Brenner and the world crisis, Part 1: Alex Callinicos • Guglielmo Carchedi • Simon Clarke • Gerard Duménil & Dominique Lévy • Chris Harman • David Laibman • Michael Lebowitz • Fred Moseley • Murray Smith • Ellen Meiksins Wood • Plus Hal Draper on Lenin • Tony Smith on John Rosenthal • reviews by Rick Kuhn on Australian trade unionism • Charles Post on Terence Byres • Edwin Roberts on pragmatism and American Marxism • Alan Wald on Michael Löwy • Matt Worley on British Communism

HISTORICAL MATERIALISM 5
Symposium on Brenner and the world crisis, Part 2: Werner Bonefeld • Alan Freeman • Michel Husson • Anwar Shaikh • Tony Smith • Richard Walker • John Weeks • Plus Geoff Kay on abstract labour and capital • Craig Brandist on ethics, politics and dialogism’ • reviews by John Gubbay on Erik Olin Wright • Alan Johnson on the Third Camp • Sean Sayers on Marx on Russia • Adrian Haddock on Andrew Collier • Gregor Gall on organised labour • Greg Dawes on postcolonial theory

HISTORICAL MATERIALISM 6
Alan Shandro on Marx as a conservative thinker • Patrick Murray on abstract labour • Deborah Cook on Adorno and Habermas • Andrew Kliman on intrinsic value • Felton Shortall vs. Mike Lebowitz on the limits of Capital • Fine, Lapavitsas & Milonakis vs Tony Smith on Brenner • reviews by Mike Cowen on James C. Scott • Alan Carling & Paul Nolan on Jared Diamond • Jonathan Joseph on Derrida • Ian Birchall on Romain Rolland

Historical Materialism, volume 14:4 (301–307)
© Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, 2006
Also available online – www.brill.nl
HISTORICAL MATERIALISM 7
Tony Burns on ancient Greek materialism • Chik Collins on Vygotsky and Voloshinov • Paul Wetherly on Giddens • Patrick Murray on abstract labour, part II • Geert Reuten on Patrick Murray • John Kelly vs. Gregor Gall on class mobilisation • reviews by Noel Castree on Manuel Castells • Paul Blackledge on Perry Anderson • Paul Jaskot on art history • John Roberts on Adorniana • Andrew Hemingway & Paul Jaskot on T.J. Clark • Larry Wilde on human nature • Paul Jaskot on Marxism and art history. • an interview with Slavoj Zizek

HISTORICAL MATERIALISM 8
Focus on East Asia: Paul Burkett & Martin Hart-Landsberg on East Asia since the financial crisis • Michael Burke on the changing nature of capitalism • Giles Ungpakorn on Thailand • Vedi Hadiz on Indonesia • Dae-oup Chang on South Korea • Raymond Lau & Dic Lo on China • Jim Kincaid on Marxist explanations of the crisis • Joseph T. Miller in Peng Shuzhi • Paul Zarembka & Sean Sayers debate Marx and romanticism • Ted Benton & Paul Burkett debate Marx and ecology • reviews by Walden Bello, Alex Callinicos, Paul Burkett, Brett Clark and John Bellamy Foster

HISTORICAL MATERIALISM 9
Peter Gowan, Leo Panitch & Martin Shaw on the state and globalisation: a roundtable discussion • Andrew Smith on occult capitalism • Susanne Soederberg on capital accumulation in Mexico • David Laibman on the contours of the maturing socialist economy • John Rosenthal on Hegel Decoder: A Reply to Smith’s ‘Reply’ • Jonathan Hughes on analytical Marxism and ecology • reviews by Alex Callinicos, Warren Montag, Kevin Anderson and Tony Smith

HISTORICAL MATERIALISM 10:1
Ellen Meiksins Wood on infinite war • Peter Green on “the passage from imperialism to empire”: a commentary on Empire by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri • John Holloway: Going in the wrong direction: or, Mephistopheles: not Saint Francis of Assisi • Ray Kiely on actually existing globalisation, deglobalisation, and the political economy of anticapitalist protest • Enzo Traverso on Bohemia, exile and revolution • interventions by Patrick Murray: reply to Geert Reuten, and Paul Burkett: analytical Marxism and ecology • reviews by Erik Olin Wright and Harry Brighthouse, Paresh Chattopadhyay, Chris Arthur, John Foster, Alex Law, Thomas M. Jeannot and Richard Saull

HISTORICAL MATERIALISM 10:2
Paris Yeros on Zimbabwe and the dilemmas of the Left • Sam Gindin and Leo Panitch on gems and baubles in Empire • Marcus Taylor on neoliberalism in Chile • Sean Creaven on Bhaskar’s Dialectic and Marxism • Paul Nolan on Darwinian aspects of historical materialism • interventions by Jason C. Myers on ideology after the welfare state, Tony Smith on Hegel, and Robert Albritton with a response to Chris Arthur • film review by Mike Wayne on Robert Guédiguian’s La ville est tranquille • reviews by Milton Fisk, Ian Birchall, Dave Beech, and Gregor Gall

HISTORICAL MATERIALISM 10:3
Giovanni Arrighi on lineages of empire • Ellen Meiksins Wood on landlords and peasants, masters and slaves: class relations in Greek and Roman antiquity • Peter Thomas on philosophical strategies: Althusser and Spinoza • archive: Richard B. Day on Pavel V. Maksakovskiy’s Marxist theory of the cycle and Pavel V. Maksakovskiy on the general theory of the cycle • intervention by Neil Davidson: Stalinism, ‘nation theory’ and Scottish history: a reply to John Foster • reviews by Ian Birchall, Ian Buchanan and Simon Bromley

HISTORICAL MATERIALISM 10:4
Symposium on Marxism and fantasy: China Miéville • Mark Bould on the dreadful credibility of absurd things • Stuart Elden on Lefebvre, Rabelais and intellectual history • Ishay Landa on Tolkien’s political unconscious • Mike Wayne on utopianism and film • Anna Kornbluh on
for the love of money • Alex Law and Jan Law on magical urbanism • Ben Watson on Adorno, Tolkein, Burroughs • commentary by Ana Dinerstein on the battle of Buenos Aires: crisis, insurrection, and the reinvention of politics in Argentina • archive: Jurriaan Bendien • Ernest Mandel: anticipation and hope as categories of historical materialism • interventions: Carl Freedman with a note on Marxism and fantasy • Fredric Jameson on radical fantasy • Steve Shaviro on capitalist monsters. reviews by Neil Maycroft, Mark Bould, Andrew M. Butler, Mike Haynes, and Tony Smith

HISTORICAL MATERIALISM 11:1
Alfredo Saad-Filho on the political economy of Lula’s election • Maria Turchetto on Hardt and Negri • George Liodakis on the role of biotechnology in the agro-food system • Paul Paulucci on the scientific and the dialectical method • Sean Sayers on creative activity and alienation in Hegel and Marx • Martin Hart-Landsberg and Paul Burkett on development, crisis and class struggle in East Asia • Dan Bousfield on export-led development and imperialism • Jim Kincade on underconsumption versus the rate of profit • Christopher J. Arthur on the Hegel-Marx connection • Tony Smith on the homology thesis • Christopher J. Arthur once more on the homology thesis • reviews by Scott MacWilliam, Ian Birchall and Pete Glatter

HISTORICAL MATERIALISM 11:2
Tony Smith on globalisation and capitalist property relations: a critical assessment of David Held’s cosmopolitan theory • Paul Cammack on the governance of global capitalism: a new materialist perspective • William Brown on the World Bank, Africa and politics: a comment on Paul Cammack’s analysis • Simon Pirani on class clashes with party: politics in Moscow between the civil war and the New Economic Policy • Glenn Rikowski on alien life: Marx and the future of the human • Interventions: James Gordon Finlayson on the theory of ideology and the ideology of theory: Habermas contra Adorno • Deborah Cook with a response to Finlayson • Alex Callinicos on egalitarianism and anticapitalism: a reply to Harry Brighouse and Erik Olin Wright • reviews by Enzo Traverso, Chik Collins, Deborah Cook, Christopher Arthur, and Jesse Stansell

HISTORICAL MATERIALISM 11:3
Simon Bromley with reflections on Empire, imperialism and United States hegemony • Jairus Banaji on the fictions of free labour: contract, coercion, and so-called unfree labour • Alan Milchman on Marxism and the Holocaust • Alfredo Saad-Filho and Marta Harnecker with commentaries on understanding the past to make the future • an interview with Michael Hardt • Interventions by Angela Dimitrakaki on art and politics continued: avant-garde, resistance and the multitude in Documenta 11 • by Andrew Levine & Elliott Sober with a reply to Paul Nolan’s ‘What’s Darwinian About Historical Materialism?’ • Paul Nolan on Levine and Sober: a rejoinder • interviews by Kees van der Pijl, Colin Moores, Ray Kiely, Ian Birchall, Alan Shandro, Pranav Jani, and Neil Larsen

HISTORICAL MATERIALISM 11:4
Symposium: The American Worker – Alan Johnson on ‘The American Worker’ and the absurd truth about Marxism • Daniel Gaido on ‘The American Worker’ and the theory of permanent revolution • Karl Kautsky on Werner Sombart’s Why Is There No Socialism in the United States? • Paul Le Blanc on the absence of socialism in the United States: contextualising Kautsky’s ‘The American Worker’ • Loren Goldner on the non-formation of a working-class political party in the United States, 1900–45 • Stephen Resnick and Richard Wolff on exploitation, consumption, and the uniqueness of US capitalism • Noel Ignatiev on whiteness and class struggle • Alan Johnson on equalitarian Marxism and the politics of social movements • Peter Hudis on workers as reason: the development of a new relation of worker and intellectual in American Marxist humanism • Archive by Franz Mehring with a literary review of Hermann Schlüter’s Die Anfänge der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung in Amerika and with an obituary of Friedrich Sorge • Intervention by Christopher Phelps with “Why Wouldn’t Sidney Hook Permit the Republication of His Best Book?” • film review by Bryan D. Palmer on Martin Scorsese’s The Gangs of New York • Reviews

HISTORICAL MATERIALISM 12:1
Wal Suchting on Althusser’s late thinking about materialism • Alan Carling on The Darwinian Weberian: W.G. Runciman and the microfoundations of historical materialism • Peter E. Jones on discourse and the materialist conception of history: critical comments on critical discourse analysis • interventions by John McIroy with critical reflections on recent British Communist Party history • by John Foster on Marxists, Weberians and nationality: a response to Neil Davidson • review articles by Paul Wetherly, Paul Blackledge, Paul Burkett, Jan Dumolyn, Steve Wright • a conference report by Enda Brophy on the Operaismo a Convegno conference.

HISTORICAL MATERIALISM 12:2
Brian Kelly on materialism and the persistence of race in the Jim Crow South • Domenico Losurdo on towards a critique of the category of totalitarianism • Massimo De Angelis on separating the doing and the deed: capitalism and the continuous character of enclosures • James Turner on Marx’s critique of Samuel Bailey • interventions by Paresh Chattopadhyay replying to Mike Haynes • Mike Haynes responding to Chattopadhyay • David McNally responding to Chik Collins • Chik Collins responding to McNally • review articles by Vasant Kaiwar, Pete Green, Samuel Friedman and Matthew Caygill.

HISTORICAL MATERIALISM 12:3

HISTORICAL MATERIALISM 12:4
Nick Dyer-Witheford on 1844/2004/2044: the return of species-being • Marcel Van Der Linden on council communism • Symposium: Marxism and African Realities • Liam Campion’s editorial introduction • Pablo L.E. Idahosa and Bob Shenton the africanist’s ‘new’ clothes • Henry Bernstein on considering Africa’s agrarian questions • Patrick Bond on bankrupt Africa: imperialism, subimperialism and the politics of finance • Ray Bush on undermining Africa • Alex
Nunn and Sophia Price on managing development: EU and African relations through the evolution of the Lomé and Cotonou Agreements • Alejandro Colas on the re-invention of populism: Islamist responses to capitalist development in the contemporary Maghreb • Christopher Wise on geo-thematics, and orality-literacy studies in the Sahel • Carlos Oya on the empirical investigation of rural class formation: methodological issues in a study of large and mid-scale farmers in Senegal • Franco Barchiesi on the ambiguities of ‘liberation’ in left analyses of the South-African democratic transition • Brian Rafopoulos and Ian Phimister on Zimbabwe now: the political economy of crisis and coercion • Interventions • David Moore on Marxism and Marxist intellectuals in schizophrenic Zimbabwe: how many rights for Zimbabwe’s Left? A comment • Ashwin Desai on magic, realism and the state in post-apartheid South Africa • Review Articles • Paresh Chattopadhyay on ‘Karl Marx – Exzerpte und Notizen: Sommer 1844 bis Anfang 1847’, in Gesamtausgabe (MEGA) vierte Abteilung, Band 3 • Nigel Harris on Trade in Early India: Themes in Indian History, edited by Ranabir Chakravarti, and Michael McCormack’s Origins of the European Economy: Communications and Commerce, AD 300–900 • Surinder S. Jodhka on Tom Brase’s Towards a Political Economy of Unfree Labour and Peasants, Populism and Postmodernism • Henry Vandenburgh on Habermas, Critical Theory, and Health, edited by Graham Scambler.

HISTORICAL MATERIALISM 13:1

HISTORICAL MATERIALISM 13:2
The Isaac and Tamara Deutscher Memorial Prize Lecture (Part I) • Benno Teschke on Bourgeois Revolution, State Formation and the Absence of the International • Debating the Hegel-Marx Connection: A Symposium on Christopher J. Arthur’s ‘The New Dialectic and Marx’s “Capital”’ • Jim Kincaid’s editorial introduction • Alex Callinicos on Against the New Dialectics • Patrick Murray on The New Giant’s Staircase • Jim Kincaid on A Critique of Value-Form Marxism • Jacques Bidet on The Dialectician’s Interpretation of Capital • Ian Hunt on The Economic Cell-Form • Robert Albritton on How Dialectics Runs Aground: The Antinomies of Arthur’s Dialectic of Capital • Christopher J. Arthur’s Reply to Critics • Intervention • Sean Creaven on Marxism and Realism: A Reply to Branwen Gruffyd Jones • Review articles • Bob Jessop on Antoine Artouss’ Marx, L’Etat et la politique • Alan Milchman on Domenico Losurdo’s Heidegger and the Ideology of War: Community, Death, and the West • Daniel Lazare on 51 Documents: Zionist Collaboration With the Nazis, edited by Lenni Brenner • James Devine on Michael Perlman’s Transcending the Economy: On the Potential of Passionate Labor and the Wastes of the Market • German Books for Review • The Historical-Critical Dictionary of Marxism • Frigga Haug (translated by Peter Thomas) on Gender Relations
HISTORICAL MATERIALISM 13:3
The Isaac and Tamara Deutscher Memorial Prize Lecture (Part II) • Neil Davidson on How Revolutionary Were the Bourgeois Revolutions? • Articles • Jean-Jacques Lecerel on Deleuze, Guattari and Marxism • Rick Kuhn on Henryk Grossman and the Recovery of Marxism • Thomas Marois on From Economic Crisis to a ‘State’ of Crisis: The Emergence of Neoliberalism in Costa Rica • Bob Cannon on Retrieving the Normative Content of Marxism: From a Subject-Centred to an Intersubjective Critique of Capitalism • Interventions: Replies to Ana Dinerstein

HISTORICAL MATERIALISM 13:4
The Isaac and Tamara Deutscher Memorial Prize Lecture (Part II) • Neil Davidson on How Revolutionary Were the Bourgeois Revolutions? (contd.) • Articles • Deborah Cook on The Sundered Totality of System and Lifeworld • Fotini Vaki on Adorno Contra Habermas and the Claims of Critical Theory as Immanent Critique • Gary Farnell on Benjamin as Producer in The Arcades Project • Commodity Fetishism and Revolutionary Subjectivity: A Symposium on John Holloway’s ‘Change the World without Taking Power’ • Guido Starosta’s Editorial Introduction • Daniel Bensaid on a Recent Book by John Holloway • Marcel Stoetzel on How to Make Adorno Scream, Some Notes on John Holloway’s ‘Change the World without Taking Power’ • Michael A. Lebowitz on Holloway’s Scream: Full of Sound and Fury • Massimo de Angelis on How?!!! An Essay on John Holloway’s ‘Change the World without Taking Power’ • Leigh Binford on Holloway’s Marxism • John Holloway: No • Interview • Max Blechman, Anita Chari, Rafeeq Hasan on Democracy, Dissensus, and the Aesthetics of Class Struggle: An Exchange with Jacques Rancière • Review Articles • Ian Birchall on Robert Barcia’s La véritable histoire de Lutte Ouvrière, Daniel Bensaid’s Les trotskysmes and Une lente impatience, Christophe Bouruseiller’s Histoire générale de l’ultra-gauche, Philippe Campinchi’s Les lambertistes, Frédéric Charpier’s Histoire de l’extrême gauche trotskiste, André Fichaut’s Sur le pont, Daniel Gluckstein’s & Pierre Lambert’s Itinéraires, Michel Lequenne’s Le trotskysme: une histoire sans fard, Jean-Jacques Marie’s Le trotskysme et les trotskystes, Christophe Nick’s Les trotskistes, and Benjamin Stora’s La dernière génération d’octobre • Simon Kennedy on G.A. Cohen’s Karl Marx’s Theory of History: A Defence • Maria Elisa Cevacso on Fredric Jameson’s A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present • Tony Smith on Phases of Capitalist Development: Booms, Crises and Globalizations, edited by Robert Albritton, Makoto Itoh, Richard Westra and Alan Zuege • John Michael Roberts on Masses, Classes and the Public Sphere, edited by Mike Hill and Warren Montag • German Books for review • Historical-Critical Dictionary of Marxism • Bastiaan Wiekenga, Hermann Klenner and Susanne Lettow on Justice

HISTORICAL MATERIALISM 14:1
Article • Andrew Burke on Nation, Landscape, and Nostalgia in Patrick Keiller’s Robinson in Space • Symposium: On Costas Lapavitsas’s ‘Social Foundations of Markets, Money and Credit’ • Jim Kincaid on Finance, Trust and the Power of Capital • Gary Dymowski on Money and Credit in Heterodox Theory: Reflections on Lapavitsas • Dick Bryan and Michael Rafferty on Money in Capitalism or Capitalist Money? • Makoto Itoh on Political Economy of Money, Credit and Finance in Contemporary Capitalism – Remarks on Lapavitsas and Dymski • Kazutoshi Miyazawa on the Anarchical Nature of the Market and the Emergence of Money • Costas Lapavitsas on Power and Trust as Constituents of Money and Credit • Interventions: Replies to Ana Dinerstein
on the Argentine Crisis • Guido Starosta Editorial Introduction • Alberto Bonnet on ¡Que se vayan todos! Discussing the Argentine crisis and insurrection • Juan Iñigo Carrera on Argentina: The Reproduction of Capital Accumulation Through Political Crisis • Juan Grigera on Argentina: On Crisis and a Measure for Class Struggle • Review Articles • Paresh Chattopadhyay & Martin Thomas on Stephen A. Resnick and Richard D. Wolff’s Class Theory and History: Capitalism and Communism in the USSR • Alan Freeman on Guglielmo Carchedi’s For Another Europe: a Class Analysis of European Economic Integration • Loren Goldner on Christophe Bourseiller’s Histoire générale de l’ultra-gauche • Christopher May on Mark Poster’s What’s the Matter with the Internet?

HISTORICAL MATERIALISM 14:2

HISTORICAL MATERIALISM 14:3